

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

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# THE HAUNTED HOUSE

FURTHER EXPLOITS OF CHANTECOQ  
THE FAMOUS DETECTIVE

BY

ARTHUR BERNÈDE

*Author of "The Mystery of the Louvre"*

*Translated by*  
Metcalf Wood



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

THE scene of this interesting story is laid on the beautiful coast of Brittany—a district of France that has for many reasons an especial interest to English people, as its very name suggests.

The peasant folk of Brittany, even to-day, speak a *patois* which is, in reality, the old Celtic language; and consequently the fishermen of Cornwall and Wales find no difficulty in making themselves understood by the country folk on these coasts. There is also a great similarity in the general appearance of its rocky coast to the coast of Cornwall. Further, St. Michael's Mount and Mont St. Michel are, as is well known, extraordinarily alike.

The ancient stone monuments found in Brittany closely resemble those found in England at Stonehenge and elsewhere.

The whole of the peninsula is very picturesque—from the celebrated Emerald Coast to the shores of the Bay of Biscay; while the costume of the inhabitants of both sexes is very peculiar both in cut and colour. Bright red and blue are much used not only by the women but in the coats and waistcoats of the men. And nowhere has a taste for

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marvellous legends been kept so green as in Brittany. An entire folk-literature still flourishes there and is manifested by the larger number of folk-tales and folk songs.

A Parisian artist, Lachesnaye, built a house on the Brittany coast near Vannes, overlooking the Bay of Biscay. He chose the site of an old ruined fort where a number of Royalists, during the French Revolution, were imprisoned and executed. The legend goes that the ghosts of these Royalists haunt the place and appear on certain festival nights: such as Christmas, Easter and so forth.

In the first chapter of the book this fact is referred to by an American when he is calling on the Lachesnayes. They are interested in the story, but refuse to look upon it seriously; and they laughingly describe it as a foolish village tale.

What happens you will discover when you read this book. The incidents have been authenticated by no less an authority than the well-known savant, Camille Flammarion, and vouched for in his celebrated work "On the Edge of Death and Mystery."

"Those of my readers," says Monsieur Arthur Bernède, the author of the book, "who are tempted to doubt the extraordinary happenings that I am going to relate, if they study the above-mentioned work, will see that I have kept within the bounds of absolute truth. How many times, in reading a newspaper account of strange mysterious and disconcerting occurrences which upset all accepted

ideas, have we said: 'No novelist would ever have dared to write such a story or invent situations so extraordinary!' However, here they are!"

If ever the well-known adage: "Fact is often stranger than fiction" needed an example, here is as good a one as can be found.

Monsieur Arthur Bernède is to-day one of the most celebrated and popular French writers of this class of fiction. Another of his successful novels, centred round a murder, committed in the Louvre in Paris.

THE EDITOR.





charming persons

The haunted house

# THE HAUNTED HOUSE

## CHAPTER I

### THE STORY OF THE GHOSTS.

"A LITTLE more coffee, Doctor?"

"No, thank you, dear lady; it is certainly very delicious, but if I said 'yes' I should not sleep a wink all night, and, to-morrow morning, I should not be in a fit state to attend my patients."

"And you, dear friend?"

"Yes, *please*."

Yvette Lachesnaye, a charming person of about twenty-two, filled up her cup of quaint Breton china that was held out to her by James Wilbright, a well-set-up young man, about thirty years old, a thorough Anglo-Saxon, who was wearing a well-cut sports suit.

Then, turning to her husband, a good-looking fellow, typically French, with an engaging and pleasant smile that inspired confidence and sympathy, said:

"And you, dear Jean?"

"With pleasure, darling."

They exchanged a rapid glance full of understanding and love.

"What a charming couple!" whispered Doctor Le Bosser, in James Wilbright's ear, who, sitting near him on a divan, was puffing the smoke of his cabinet Havana up to the lofty ceiling of the spacious room which was rather like a studio.

"Delightful!" replied the American mechanically,



as his eyes wandered to the large bay-window looking out over the sea, through which one heard the continual lapping of the waves close by.

The night was superb. In the bright moonlight silver spangles shimmered on the great sheet of water, in the midst of which, here and there, were several little rocky islets washed continually by waves which rolled in from the horizon like an army of angry sea-horses.

Yvette, supple and graceful, with natural ruby lips, half-opened in a charming smile, went up to a carved wooden table which had once upon a time adorned the sacristy of an old Breton church along with wonderful hangings of the Renaissance period on its walls . . . she put down the *cafetière* and, turning to her guests, asked them which they would take:

"Liqueur brandy, calvados, old marc, armagnac, chartreuse or benedictine?"

"Brandy!" said the American.

"Calvados!" answered the Doctor.

"Armagnac for me!" said the master of the house.

Madame Lachesnaye filled three large glasses with the various liqueurs and handed them on a tray to each of these gentlemen, taking their cups, which she put back on the table. It was all done with a grace and simplicity that made her still more attractive.

"You are looking at the sea?" she said to James Wilbright.

The American nodded his head. Then, without taking his eyes from the magnificent panorama which lay before him, he murmured:

"I have rarely seen it so delightful as it is this evening."

"It is, indeed, very beautiful," said Jean Lachesnaye as he went towards the window.

Then, with the enthusiasm of a real artist he continued:

"Ah! Doctor, what a beautiful spot. You have every reason to be proud of it and love it!"

"Then you admire our little peninsular?" exclaimed Le Bosser, with cordiality.

"True," declared Lachesnaye, "for our happiest time is when we are here. . . . Isn't that so, Yvette?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Mme. Lachesnaye. "And I wish for nothing better than to spend the whole of the year here."

"You are not afraid of getting bored?" suggested the Doctor.

"My dear Doctor," protested Yvette, "allow me to tell you that a woman is never bored when she has her husband near to spoil her and a little baby to look after."

"Bravo!" Le Bosser added approvingly; "you, at any rate, are not one of these modern women. . . . I congratulate you, and I congratulate our dear friend Lachesnaye for finding a wife who is not only a true artist's companion, but one who can appreciate the value of a home."

"Blush, my dear Yvette," said Lachesnaye; "but I am bound to say that the Doctor is absolutely right."

And with youthful enthusiasm and an air of perfect sincerity he continued:

"Just think, my friends, that at twenty-five, during a dinner to which my fellow artists had thought fit to invite me on my return from Rome, where, as *pensionnaire* at the villa Medici I had passed two happy years, I took a solemn oath never to marry. Why? . . . I do not know exactly.

"Was it because, in breaking my usual rule, I had drunk too much champagne, or because I was obsessed with the absurd idea that an artist should never encumber himself with a wife? I really cannot say . . . I swear it. . . .

"A year later, I married Yvette, and what was still



more astonishing, the daughter of a retired city man. That, in my world, was a terrible thing to do. One cannot accuse me of having married for money; my parents had left me a fortune which had made me independent. . . .

"People whispered that I had done for myself; tied a rope round my neck. But when those who blamed me or chaffed me knew the lady who had made me break my vow so quickly—blush again, dear Yvette—they quite understood. And not content with forgiving me they unanimously and enthusiastically approved of my action."

With charming embarrassment Yvette broke in:

"Jean, please be quiet!"

Then, blushing, she added:

"I am just going to peep and see if baby is sleeping all right."

So, with graceful movements, she disappeared into the next room.

Le Bosser, a man about forty-five, who looked more like a sailor than a doctor, and who had never left his beloved district around Quiberon since he was a student at the *lycée* at Nantes and took his medical course in Paris, ended up by saying:

"A true Frenchwoman—that."

And he added as a further compliment:

"She is worthy to be a Breton woman."

As for James Wilbright, after he had taken another sip of his liqueur and had lit another cigar, he turned his steadfast gaze once again to the open bay-window through which one could smell the ozone.

Lachesnaye continued:

"My dear Doctor, my wife and I are Bretons by adoption and love. Do you know why? Oh! It is quite simple!

"During the first year of our married life, like the smart people we thought we were, we arranged to

spend three weeks at Deauville, naturally in August.

"We stayed there only three days."

"Why?" asked Le Bosser whose bright blue eyes lit up his face.

Lachesnaye retorted:

"Because we very soon came to the conclusion that life there was empty, artificial, stupid—a life which consists of senselessly exhibiting oneself and of going systematically through the dull routine of forced pleasures to which the slaves of society are eternally condemned.

"All these pitiful exhibitions of snobbery sickened us, so we mutually agreed to get away.

"But where could we go?

"I remembered that one of my old friends, an American artist, James Wilbright, had built a very charming villa on the Quiberon peninsular that juts out into the open sea, where he stays for weeks on end, sometimes even in the winter.

"I recollected also that he praised the entrancing beauties of the place that he did not hesitate to describe as incomparable. . . . I said to my wife: 'What about paying Wilbright a visit?' 'By all means.' . . .

"The next morning we started off in the car in good time.

"Going through the beautiful country of Normandy we lunched at Rennes. In the afternoon we passed through the marvellously picturesque villages of Vannes and Auray, with characteristic appearance so very fitting to their quaint legends; each of which seems to be a little chapter of local or traditional history.

"And as we went we were attracted, fascinated by the district of Morbihan which so many tourists miss either by intent or by ignorance; but which is, nevertheless, one of the most beautiful and entrancing



districts in all France; if only the local authorities took the trouble to give the same attention to the roads as they do in other parts.

"Soon we reached a village, later, a little town, Kerhostin and Saint-Pierre, and then we took the main road to Quiberon. Following the direction of a signpost, we took the road to the right which leads to the village of Kerné. It was near there that Wilbright has his place. We arrived at last. You know it, Doctor, that old country house that our friend has had fitted with every modern comfort without sacrificing any of its character.

"We were received with open arms.

"That very day, after having done the honours of his charming abode, James wanted to show us the delights of the neighbourhood; an experience that Yvette and I will never forget. I will not describe to you, dear Doctor, the beauties of a district that you know far better than I do.

"We decided to imitate our friend, James, and settle there definitely . . . every summer.

"I must needs have a house with a studio like Wilbright, a great barn built of stone adjoining the house. But the house was the difficulty. . . .

"Either the owners, for reasons best known to themselves, refused to sell—or at any rate the places they would sell were not what I wanted for my summer abode . . . or, perhaps I should say, had not the position or aspect I required.

"So we determined to build and choose our site. We set our hearts upon an old, disused fort on the coast, about a hundred yards from the *Cave of the Winds*; and for a very reasonable sum, but not without a little difficulty, we bought it from the Government.

"An architect friend, according to our suggestions, drew up the plans of our future residence.



"We got in touch with a local builder. . . .

"Needless to tell you we were so delighted with it that we did not contemplate then or in the autumn going back to Paris . . . if we had not felt nervous for baby—remember he is hardly six months old—and if it had not been for the sharp winds that prevail during the stormy season, I think my wife and I would have stayed there all the winter."

"The truth is," said the Doctor, "you would have enjoyed, from the top of your splendid observatory, the performances by the full orchestra that the raging sea alone knows how to execute."

And while a somewhat sceptical smile played round his lips which were shaded by a small fair moustache that was beginning to turn grey, he added:

"But maybe you would have been worried by the visits of the ghosts which, during December and January nights, frequent these parts."

"What, Doctor?" exclaimed Lachesnaye. "You, a man of science, you believe in ghosts?"

"After all," replied Le Bosser, "has not Science herself, especially in the last half century, created some marvels that in past days have been attributed solely to supernatural agencies?"

"It is quite true," the young artist admitted; "but even to-day I am not aware that it has been stated or proved that ghosts exist. . . ."

"For all that," retorted the Doctor, "one comes across reliable people, who are not given to romancing, and who are not in the least superstitious, who swear that they have seen them."

"And you, Doctor," inquired Lachesnaye, "have you seen one?"

"Never!"

"And you . . . James?"

"Ghosts . . .?" repeated the American, who for the last minute or two had paid more attention

to the discussion between Lachesnaye and the Doctor.

Then with deliberation he remarked:

"I have never *seen* one . . . but I have *heard* them."

"Oh! Tell us about it!" exclaimed Yvette, who had just returned to the studio.

"What is the good?" expostulated James, his face quite serious.

Yvette insisted:

"I love ghost stories . . . and I love them all the more because I do not believe in them . . . especially this evening, with a full moon like this, and with the lullaby of the waves, one feels so safe in a new house which has no secret doors or passages and is not, like an old house, a good hunting ground for spirits who want to return to earth."

Wilbright, still more determined, replied in his American-French accent:

"I would rather not speak of those things."

"Why?"

"Because I'm afraid I should frighten you."

"Me?" Yvette protested. "Ask my husband if I am a coward."

"Not coward enough!" said the painter, smiling.

The young woman continued gaily:

"I assure you, Wilbright, that if I found myself face to face with a ghost, I should not be afraid—far from it. I feel sure I should take advantage of the opportunity of getting further facts in addition to those already known, which are so vague and doubtful."

"In that case, dear friend," said the American, whose countenance had assumed its customary expression, "I will not hesitate to satisfy you, with the permission, naturally, of your husband."

"Permission that I willingly give," added Lachesnaye.



"Very well, here you are," said James Wilbright.

And, deliberately and calmly, as if he was telling the most ordinary story in the world, he commenced:

"Last winter, I had invited several friends to a Christmas Eve party at Kerné . . . we were together in my studio . . . we'd had supper . . . we were all in very good spirits but had not in the least overdone it . . . that surprises you with Americans who were not under prohibition laws . . . however, it is true.

"Two charming young women who accompanied us—you know them Lachesnaye: Mrs. Barton and her cousin, Miss Wilkins—wanted to dance. I put a one-step on my gramophone and I was just releasing the catch when suddenly there was a violent ringing at the front door.

"The servants had gone to bed, so I went to the door, grumbling how inopportune and ill-timed it was for anyone to come and disturb us at that hour. . . .

"I opened it. . . . *There was no one there.*

"Satisfied that I was the victim of a stupid joke, I banged the door to, turned the key in the lock, and re-joined my guests.

"We started to dance again.

"Five minutes later there was another ring, longer than the preceding one. . . .

"I rushed down, with one of my friends.

"In the vestibule, I seized a stick, determined to administer a severe lesson to the author of this stupid jest. I opened the door. Again, nobody.

"We went out into the garden. . . .

"We found that the entrance gate was shut and bolted, and it was impossible, in the time, for the mysterious visitor to have climbed over the garden wall which is twelve feet high and has broken glass on the top, making it a very dangerous undertaking.

"No doubt about it, he must have hidden in the tamarind shrubs, by the side of the wall,

"Whilst my friend went to get a lantern, I remained on guard, all ears and eyes. My friend came back with my other guests . . . the two ladies, who seemed highly amused at the adventure, were with them.

"Some equipped with lanterns, others with electric torches, we searched the shrubberies. . . . Nothing! Absolutely nothing . . . !

"Then we hurried back to the studio; the wind was very cold. . . .

"To warm themselves, some took whisky, others danced to the gramophone. . . . A quarter of an hour later there were loud knocks on the shutters.

"We all stopped . . . the knocks stopped also . . . but re-commenced still more violently in another instant.

"It seemed as though a catapult was shooting large stones at the wooden panels.

"I ran up the staircase that leads from my studio to my bedroom, four steps at a time.

"The window was open. . . . I took my revolver from my pocket. I always carry it with me.

"The blows continued, ringing through the house. . . .

"I leaned out. . . . *I heard nothing more. . . . I could see nothing.*

"I waited some seconds. The phenomena continued on the east side of the house. . . . I rushed into a room that looks out in that direction. . . .

"Scarcely had I entered, when a pane of glass broke in pieces . . . however, I am sure no missile had hit it.

"I had hardly recovered from my astonishment when I heard several voices calling out:

"James Wilbright! . . . James Wilbright!"

"I felt quite sure that the voices came from the studio.

"I ran quickly down to my guests. . . . I asked



them why they called me. . . . They all replied that during my absence they had not opened their mouths. . . . I saw by their expressions that they were telling the truth. The men were solemn and serious, the women were frightened.

"Thereupon, suddenly, groans seemed to come from the bowels of the earth, then heartrending sobs and pitiful cries, drowned in the rising tumult of the sea.

"Mrs. Barton fainted; Miss Wilkins sank into an arm-chair and hid her face in her hands. There was a loud peal of thunder and then nothing more . . . silence."

And the American ended up:

"Don't think that I want to thrill you by relating a kind of Edgar Poe story that I have made up, line by line. No, what I have told you is fact . . . the absolute truth.

"The following day I drew up an authentic account of these strange happenings. It bears the signatures of all those who were present on the occasion. . . . And that is why, since that day, I have ceased to disbelieve in the supernatural."

Extremely interested, but not in the least frightened by the story that James Wilbright had told with undeniable conviction, Yvette Lachesnaye inquired:

"Have these phenomena been repeated?"

"Not to my knowledge," answered the American.

"It is possible," suggested the artist, "that you have all been victims of a sort of auto-suggestion."

"I do not think so," said Wilbright. "The bits of broken glass on the floor of the room and the distinct marks of the blows on the shutters that I discovered the next morning, proved clearly that we had not been victims of a general hallucination."

"Then how do you explain the mystery?" inquired Yvette.

"I cannot explain it," James admitted.



"The worthy country folks have told me that not far from here lies deeply buried in the ground a considerable number of Royalists who, in the Revolution, during the expedition of Hoche to the peninsular of Quiberon, hidden in the fort on the same site as this house is built, were pitilessly shot down by the Republican troops.

"The old people, the very old ones, who hand down traditions to the rising generations, maintain that these poor wretches come to ask your prayers at the great religious festivals—All Saints, Easter, Whitsuntide and the 15th of August. . . ."

"The 15th of August!" repeated Yvette.

"The Feast of the Virgin Mary," explained Le Bosser.

"Why, to-day is the 15th of August," pointed out the young wife.

And laughingly she added:

"So, we must be on the look-out for ghosts?"

"I hope not," said James seriously, "because I don't remember having spent a more terrible night than the one I have just described."

M. Le Bosser, who had listened in silence to Wilbright's story without showing any sign of appreciation or otherwise, got up, saying:

"It is late enough to think of the old proverb: *How quickly time passes in good company*, and one may add: 'It is not good company that does not know when to go.'"

"Why doctor!" exclaimed Yvette; "it is only ten o'clock."

"True, dear lady, but from here to Quiberon is a good step. I have to walk. I am afraid I must go."

"May I take you in my car?" suggested Jean.

"Oh, no thank you!" replied the Doctor; "the walk will do me good, *pedibus cum jambis*. Walking is

splendid exercise, especially in my case, as I am putting on weight."

"I will come with you," said the American. . . .  
"I love a walk at night, above all on a fine night like this . . . if you don't mind we will go along by the sea. . . . It is charming by moonlight."

"By all means," replied M. Le Bosser.

As he said "Good night," he remarked:

"Be sure you do not dream that the Royalists are tickling your toes."

"Doctor," replied Yvette gaily, "I am not nervous. They won't come. And if they do I shall welcome them and ask them to tell me some tales."

There was a general hand-shaking. The Lachesnays escorted their guests through the gardens. They watched the Doctor and the American from the gate and, in the bright moonlight, saw them reach the path along the cliff and vanish out of sight at a good pace.

For a time they stood outside, enjoying the perfect night with its clear sky, sea and rocks.

Jean exclaimed:

"It is not late, we ought to have gone with them a little way."

"So we should," answered Yvette, "would you like to go as far as the *Cave of the Winds*?"

"Yes, very much, dear; just a moment whilst I lock the door. Here, thank goodness," remarked the artist, "we are not in the suburbs of Paris. We need not fear burglars."

"True," the young woman acquiesced.

And with a hearty laugh she added:

"Here, there are only ghosts!"



## CHAPTER II

IN WHICH, IN A QUIET AND PEACEFUL HOUSE  
WE SEE STRANGE AND UNCANNY PHENOMENA.

JEAN and Yvette going arm in arm . . . like lovers, reached the neighbouring cliffs.

Barely two hundred yards away, one could hear a shrill, swishing sound: the sea rushing into a huge cauldron, in the midst of a gigantic pile of rocks which disappeared underground. It was the famous *Cave of the Winds*. As Jean and Yvette got nearer, the sound seemed to grow less, the heavy roar of the waves rushing into the bottomless cavern, lost, by degrees, its mournful monotony.

Every now and then the roar rose from the abyss, overwhelming the deep and continuous growl of the water invading the fathomless pit.

When they were near the abyss Yvette exclaimed, as she gripped her husband's arm:

"It reminds one of the sobs that Wilbright spoke about just now."

"*The long drawn sobs of violins*," sang Lachesnaye, who had a fine baritone voice.

"Listen, Jean," said the young wife, "the sound is like moans and cries—it is quite moving."

"Hallo! There are the ghosts . . . from our friend's house! There must be a subterranean passage there like this. . . . And that is what he and his friends heard. He was careful to say that they had not drunk very much. . . . For all that I feel

sure they had had a good many cocktails and enough champagne to make them lose their heads. Don't you think so, Jean dear?"

"I agree, sweetheart . . . now, shall we go back?"

"Let me listen a little longer . . . it is so enthralling. . . . I love the thrill, although it makes me feel creepy."

Yvette listened awhile to the strange dirge . . . a regular wail of despair, particularly weird, as it sounded like human voices.

Then, suddenly, she said:

"And now, let's go home."

They returned to Ker-Yvette, which, with its white silhouette in the moonlight, looked like a cinematograph scene lit by a strong arc-light.

"Why!" exclaimed Lachesnaye; "there are no lights . . . we certainly left the studio and the hall lamp alight."

"You're right," exclaimed Yvette.

And jokingly she added:

"Perhaps the ghosts have cut off the electricity."

"Or rather nurse has."

"She had gone to bed when I went to kiss Jackie."

"Perhaps Françoise, the housemaid."

"Or the chauffeur, or the cook."

"It doesn't matter."

"No."

They went into the house. On entering, Lachesnaye turned on the switch, but the hall lamp would not light.

"It's fused," he said.

"Luckily we have some candles," said Yvette, "but it is very tiresome, all the same."

"You must not grumble too much," remarked Jean. "During the two and a half months that we have been here it's only the second time that it has failed."

He lit his pocket lighter, bolted the front door and

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joined his wife just as she reached the pitch-pine staircase which led to the first floor.

In order to understand perfectly the events which followed, let me give you a short description of Villa Ker-Yvette, which was built on the foundations of an old seventeenth-century fort. The new owners had demolished the outworks and an old, ruined wall which interfered with the view. Ker-Yvette consisted of a basement in the building of which they had made use of casemates which they transformed into a kitchen, scullery, coal-house, etc. . . . where they discovered an old freshwater well, which, it seemed, was inexhaustible.

Above, a large ground floor, sixty feet long and forty-five feet wide, consisting of a dining-room, a studio and a private sitting-room.

The three rooms which led into the hall were decorated in Breton style and furnished in perfect taste.

On the first floor, their bedroom, separated from the nursery, where little Jackie slept, by a dressing-room.

There were also two visitors' rooms.

The second floor consisted of the servants' rooms.

Twenty yards away from the house was the garage with a bedroom for the chauffeur.

The whole presented a very picturesque appearance, comfortable and attractive, where life was very happy, especially as the owners had but one common wish: to love each other and to make everyone round them contented.

It was indeed a happy household.

Yvette and Jean had just got to their room. . . .

The moon, so bright up to then, disappeared. . . . Heavy dark clouds suddenly appeared on the horizon. One might have thought that they were great clouds of smoke from an invisible liner.



"How suddenly the weather changes here," remarked Yvette.

"That is one of the characteristics of the district," the artist replied.

"It looks as though a storm is coming. I hope that the Doctor and dear old Wilbright will not get wet."

"Don't worry," Jean replied lightly, "they are used to it."

Yvette added:

"Didn't you notice, this evening, that our friend, James, was rather morose?"

"James," said Lachesnaye, "is never very cheery."

"I have always imagined that he had some secret sorrow in his life."

"Why?"

"Young, rich, not without brains, absolutely made for modern life—it is strange that he has never married, and that, instead of living in Paris among the smart set, which seems so suited to him, he prefers to stay here eight months out of the twelve and live alone during the greater part of the winter."

"His art."

"His art! . . . In his studio I have noticed the same unfinished canvasses that I saw last season."

And Mme. Lachesnaye finished up with:

"In my opinion, Wilbright has been crossed in love."

"May be so," admitted the artist, "but he has never thought fit to give me his confidences and I have certainly never asked him for them."

"You are quite right."

Suddenly Lachesnaye asked:

"Don't you think, my 'sweet wifie,' that it is rather warm?"

"Yes, the weather is very close."

"Do you mind if I open the window?"

"Not at all."

The young wife went to the window, where suddenly she stopped.

"Did you hear that?" she asked.

"What?"

"I thought someone rang."

"Where?"

"In the hall."

"No!"

"I am sure."

"It's Wilbright and his ghost stories."

"Not at all. . . . Listen, now. . . ."

Lachesnaye listened. He started a little. He, in turn, had just heard the sound of the front door bell.

"It is too much," he exclaimed.

Snatching up a lighted candle, Jean rushed out.

"Take your revolver," Yvette called out to him. But her husband had already hurried downstairs.

Being fearless, she followed him without the least hesitation.

As they reached the vestibule, the bell rang three times, as if it had been pushed by a powerful hand.

Lachesnaye rushed to the door, pulled back the bolt, opened it and went out.

*There was no one.*

A gust of wind blew out the candle that he held in his hand, and, as he came back, a brass bowl, standing on the hall table, fell on to the tiles at Yvette's feet, as if it had been knocked over by an invisible hand.

This time, the young woman, in spite of her bravery, gave a cry of alarm.

It was impossible, in fact, to explain the mystery.

If a clever, practical joker had rung the bell, he would not have had time to get away before Lachesnaye had opened the door.

Besides, in the grounds which surrounded the house there was no tree big enough for him to hide in.

And the brass bowl which had fallen in such an ex-



traordinary way! Who had knocked it down? Was it a sleeping cat which, on waking up, had thrown it over?

There was not one in the house, and if a cat had slipped in, Jean and Yvette would certainly have heard it escaping. Lachesnaye, who had come back into the hall and shut the door, took out his lighter and re-lit the candle.

Addressing his wife who was rather pale, he said:

"You are not frightened?"

"Good heavens, no. . . ." the young woman answered in a halting voice.

Looking at the brass bowl which lay on the floor he said:

"Did you knock that over?"

"No, it was not I."

"Really. . . ."

"I was at least two yards from it and I'm sure I never touched it."

"That's strange," said Lachesnaye, as he put the bowl back in its place.

Just as he put it on the table, there was a loud noise on the first floor. It sounded as though someone had banged a door violently.

Instinctively Yvette went close to her husband . . . she had turned extremely white.

In spite of the fact that Jean was usually very cool-headed in any emergency—he had served in the Air Force—he felt a slight grip at his heart which forewarned him of coming apprehension.

But steeling himself against the fear which threatened him, he said:

"Are we dreaming, or are we awake?"

Another bang, louder than the preceding one, resounded, not, this time, from the first floor, but the second.

It sounded as if someone was hitting the door of

one of the rooms where the housemaid and the cook slept.

"These are the strange happenings about which James Wilbright has been telling us," murmured the artist.

Overcoming the fear which assailed her, Yvette exclaimed:

"I'll go and see if baby is awake. Poor nurse will be frightened to death."

She went upstairs . . . Lachnesnaye following her.

They could hear the child crying and, as they reached the landing, they heard the nurse's voice through the half-opened door:

"Help! Monsieur, help! Madame!"

And from above the cook and the housemaid were shrieking:

"Robbers! Thieves!"

"Keep calm!" Lachesnaye called out authoritatively; "if there is a burglar in the house I will very soon deal with him."

"Oh! Monsieur, Madame, if you only knew!" implored the nurse.

Yvette, almost tumbling over, ran to her little one, who, awake in his cot, his hands clenched, cried pitiously. The young mother took him up and hugged him to her breast, and comforted him with motherly caresses.

The nurse, overcome with fright, collapsed into a chair.

"You get back to bed, nurse!" Mme. Lachesnaye advised.

"If Madame only knew. . . ." moaned the nurse, still trembling.

With faltering steps she went to her bed upon which she collapsed in a helpless condition.

The child stopped crying . . . then fell asleep.



Yvette put him back into his cot. Then, going over to the nurse, said to her:

"Come, pull yourself together, Anne . . . Monsieur and I are both here."

And gaining her self-control, she added:

"Look at me, I am not afraid."

"But Madame did not hear."

"What?"

"The bang at the door . . . I thought the house was coming down. . . . I had not fallen asleep . . . . I leapt to the bottom of my bed. I tried to open the door, but could not. It was as though a strong hand was holding it. . . . At last it gave way. . . ."

"Then I saw. . . ."

Anne hid her head in her hands . . . as if the recollection of the sight that she had seen a few moments before plunged her into unspeakable terror.

"What was it you saw, Anne?" insisted Yvette.

"Oh! Madame. . . . Madame. . . ."

"A ghost?"

"Yes, perhaps; I don't know."

"Tell me, my girl."

"I saw, Madame, a ball of fire which came down from the second floor, stair by stair. I thought it was a thunderbolt and that it would explode. But the ball suddenly disappeared . . . without a sound, like a bubble bursting in the air."

"Oh! Madame, Madame, whatever was it? What was it? What was it?"

Yvette was trying to console the frightened nurse when there was another violent ring at the hall door.

Running to the landing she met her husband coming out of his room where he had been to fetch his revolver.

From the floor above Françoise and Marie continued to call for help.

In the hall, the bell was ringing violently.

The child, re-awakened, was crying loudly. . . .

Villa Ker-Yvette, usually so quiet, had become a place of unspeakable turmoil.

Lachesnaye resolutely opened the hall door. . . . This time there was someone . . . a man, the chauffeur, Pierre Rebillard, a tall, jovial young man of twenty-eight—an athletic-looking fellow—in his shirt sleeves, his trousers pulled on hastily, his face twitching. He stammered:

"Monsieur, Monsieur, I think there are ghosts in the garage!"

"Come along in," said the artist.

He had hardly uttered these words when the electrolier in the studio and the lamp in the hall lit up as if by magic.

Rebillard stuttered:

"If Monsieur would ring up the police!"

"My good man, you have lost your head. Surely you know that in these parts the telephone does not work at night."

"Oh! Yes, I did not think of that. Please excuse me, Monsieur."

"Come, pull yourself together and tell me what has happened."

Rebillard explained:

"I was fast asleep when I was awakened by a crash which shook the garage door. . . . I leapt out of bed and rushed to the window. There was nobody. I thought I had been dreaming, so I went back to bed, when a still louder crash suddenly made me start up!

"This time,' I said to myself, 'I'm sure the door has been forced.' I wanted to find out what was going on, as I could not make it out. I went down to the yard feeling quite sure that burglars were after the car. . . .

"I made a search but found no one there. . . .



"I thought the burglars had heard me coming and had hidden behind the garage. . . .

"I began to look about when I saw . . . oh! Monsieur, my hair stood on end . . . a ball of fire as large as a pumpkin coming straight at me bounding along the ground. . . . I threw myself flat on my face. . . . I expected to be hit by the thunderbolt . . . but after waiting for the explosion I raised my head. I could see nothing . . . then I got up and came as fast as I could to warn Monsieur."

And Pierre Rebillard, son of Vendée peasants, who believed in God but not in the devil, ended up with:

"Old mother Leport, of Kerné, used to tell me that there were ghosts around here . . . but I never believed it.

"Oh! I do not say these are, because I am not an idiot: I've been in the artillery . . . but all the same, there is something not natural about here. . . . And if it is someone having a joke . . . well, I don't like it."

"True," added the young painter, rather unconvincingly . . . "maybe it is only a joke; but it will cost the perpetrators dear. For the moment that is all that I can say. Now, my boy, you go to bed. You have your revolver?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Well, if the banging begins again and you see anything, fire into the air . . . first, and then, point-blank . . . if you can."

"Certainly, sir."

"However, I fancy that for to-night, we have done with these ridiculous performances."

Lachesnaye was mistaken.

He had hardly uttered the words, when cries, groans, sobs and howls of pain began again, quite near. . . .

They seemed to come from the kitchen.

With his revolver in his hand, the young artist rushed down the stairs to the basement. . . . Rebillard followed at his heels. . . . Lachesnaye switched on the light in the kitchen and the scullery.

Immediately the noises ceased.

Just as at the front door and at the garage, there was no one . . . neither living persons nor ghosts!

Suddenly, however, the chauffeur called out, pointing to a dark passage leading to the coal-house:

"The fire ball . . . the ball!"

There Lachesnaye, in turn, saw a kind of incandescent balloon rolling slowly along the ground which suddenly burst into a dazzling flame.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" said Rebillard, who could scarcely speak . . . "if you want my opinion . . . this is a haunted house!"



## CHAPTER III

### WHAT IS THE MYSTERY?

WE should be guilty of exaggeration if we were to say that anyone slept much at Villa Ker-Yvette that night.

The truth is, no one slept at all. Although these phenomena—ringing of bells, banging on doors, balls of fire, sobs and moans of all sorts—entirely ceased, fear reigned supreme in the disturbed household.

Lachesnaye alone kept cool. He tried to reassure everyone as best he could, without much success, except with his wife. In her case, his gentle words, rather than his cool behaviour, succeeded in calming her.

About nine o'clock in the morning, the artist, leaving his house in the care of his chauffeur, who, with daylight, had recovered his senses, went to see Wilbright, whose place was about a mile away. He found his friend in bed with 'flu.

"Last night," said the American, "whilst walking home with Le Bosser, I caught a chill in the back and I think I've got a touch of bronchitis . . . but it's nothing much. . . . Sit down, will you? I'm delighted to see you."

Noticing the serious and careworn look on his friend's face, James added:

"One would think there is something wrong . . . you look as though you had had a bad night. . . ."

And smilingly he asked:

"You haven't, by any chance, received a visit from the ghost?"

Lachesnaye replied seriously:

"I don't know whether they were ghosts or not; but I do know that last night in my house and grounds the same sort of queer things took place that happened here on Christmas Eve."

"What's that?" exclaimed Wilbright, sitting up.

And becoming very interested, he said:

"That's very strange. Tell me all about it."

"You are not feeling well, I won't bother you."

"It's nothing serious, I assure you," the American replied; "and certainly not bad enough to prevent me hearing something that interests me immensely."

Lachesnaye looked at his friend. Except for a little darkness under the eyes, he did not appear very ill.

Hesitating no longer to confide in him, the young artist told him in detail everything that had taken place. And without making any comments, he ended up:

"My dear James, what do you make of it?"

The American replied:

"That is a question that is very difficult to answer."

"Many a time since that strange Christmas Eve I have asked myself that question, and I confess I have never been able to give myself a satisfactory reply."

"True, up to then, I had never believed in ghosts . . . . I was, as you know, more of a materialist than an idealist, and I always disbelieved in those supernatural manifestations that I attributed to overwrought imaginations and a form of auto-suggestion which causes one to see things and hear noises that do not exist."

"I am of the same opinion. . . ." agreed Lachesnaye.

"However," continued Wilbright, "I cannot



deny that since last Christmas I have changed my opinion.

"By degrees, in spite of everything, without being absolutely convinced, I have had to ask myself if all these mysterious and inexplicable happenings are not brought about by forces concerning which we know neither the origin nor the nature."

"What you have just told me confirms that opinion still more . . . and I can give no other explanation to the mystery which, I gather, has as forcibly affected you as it puzzled me."

"So far," replied Lachesnaye, "I admit that I do not know to what to attribute these strange occurrences."

"A hoax! That is the attitude I take with my wife and the servants, in order to pacify their terror . . . but I don't really believe it."

"Anyhow, this silly joke must have been practised by someone who wants to get you out of the villa . . . I can't see any other reason. . . ."

"In that case they are very clever. . . . But how could they ring without being caught, get into my house, bang on the doors, roll balls of fire in the courtyard, down the stairs, in the passage to the cellar . . . and create a pandemonium that made my hair stand on end?"

"The truth is, it would be impossible," said the American.

"So I think," exclaimed the young artist. "But what can I do?"

"Wait," advised Wilbright.

"Suppose the ghosts re-commence their antics?"

"If they are ghosts," said James, "they have never renewed their performances at my house. It will probably be the same with you."

"The most vital thing is to reassure my wife and the household."

"This morning, I examined all the doors and looked everywhere.

"I found no traces . . . not a sign. The violent bangs on the shutters and the doors have only slightly marked the paint. Isn't that enough to upset the coolest-headed person?

"I told Yvette that she could go to an hotel at Quiberon or Saint-Pierre. . . . She refused. . . . But if, to-night, the hubbub begins again, what, I ask you, am I to do with these frightened women, especially as I cannot count upon my chauffeur. . . ? He was terrified last night."

"Would you like me to stay with you?" suggested the American.

"Thank you, very much, I appreciate your kindness," replied Lachnesnaye, "but I beg you to remain here. You are not well . . . you have a temperature. . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing!" protested Wilbright, "101.5°."

"Enough to make you careful," answered the painter. . . . "And I should never forgive myself if, on that account, your bronchitis turned to pneumonia. I insist that you stay at home.

"In order to ease the fears of my household I am going to Quiberon to explain to the police what has happened and to ask them to come to-night to Ker-Yvette and keep a lookout with me."

"A very good idea," said the American; "I am very sorry that I cannot come with you. I hope nothing will happen to-night."

Lachnesnaye went off. He returned to Ker-Yvette, where he found everything quite normal.

Assuming a casual air, he remarked to his wife:

"I have just come from Wilbright's. He is not very well. Nothing serious—just a slight chill."

"You told him?"



"Yes, he agrees with my idea of going to Quiberon to ask the police to keep watch on the house to-night. There is no need for alarm; but if you feel nervous we will go to an hotel."

"No, we'd better stay. If it is practical joking, and the perpetrators find that they have not frightened us, they will give it up."

Satisfied that things at home seemed all right Lachesnaye set off to Quiberon.

On the way he met Doctor Le Bosser on his push-bike; he had just been to visit his patients. The artist told him what had happened.

"What are you going to do?" inquired the Doctor.

"Inform the police."

"Let me give you a word of advice."

"Certainly."

"Don't. I think you have all been upset by James Wilbright's story last night."

"I wondered myself, but neither the housemaid nor the chauffeur knew of the story."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Are you sure that they have not heard that there are ghosts about the place?"

"I don't think they have."

"Well, if you like, I will go with you to the police-station. I know the Chief, he is a nice fellow, very efficient and very obliging."

## CHAPTER IV

### AWAITING EVENTS

LACHESNAYE drove his car slowly . . . Doctor Le Bosser mounted his bike and they both reached the police-station together.

The Doctor asked to speak to Chief Inspector Le Guérec who received him cordially. He introduced his friend, Lachesnaye, and explained in a few words the object of their visit.

The Chief listened attentively.

"It is not the first time," he said, "that I have heard of strange happenings in these parts.

"Hitherto, I have not paid much attention to the stories . . . because they generally came from old women and children. But now it is serious. . . . So, Doctor, may I ask your friend to give me precise details?"

With meticulous care the young artist told his story.

When he had finished, Le Guérec said:

"Do you want my opinion, Monsieur?"

"Certainly," replied the Doctor.

"Well, there are no more ghosts in that story than there are mermaids in the sea."

"Then do think it is a hoax?" asked Lachesnaye.

"No; I think it is smugglers."

"Why do you say that?" inquired the Doctor.

"Because, some years ago, the same sort of thing was reported near Lervily. We hid in the rocks and



caught the 'ghosts.' Do you know what they were? They were smugglers who were annoyed because a house had been built near their smuggling cave. And in order to prevent it being occupied they frightened the tenants in much the same way."

"I never thought of that," said the Doctor, "it sounds a very feasible explanation."

"It is certain that if there are any smugglers there they would be angry with James Wilbright and yourself for building houses in the neighbourhood."

"Do you think," remarked Lachesnaye, "that smugglers would have the audacity to perform such daring hoaxes?"

"Oh! La, la!" exclaimed the Chief; "you don't know, these fellows are capable of anything!"

"I believe you," concluded Le Bosser.

"Then I will fix it up," said Le Guérec; "this evening after dinner we will come to your house."

"Ker-Yvette."

"I know it."

"Thank you," said Lachesnaye, "I shall expect you this evening."

"Till then, Monsieur."

Le Bosser and Lachesnaye shook hands with the Chief Inspector and went off.

As soon as they were in the street, the young artist said to the Doctor:

"Do you think this good fellow is right?"

"Anyway, his idea is quite logical. Remember your villa is built on an old fort. Maybe smugglers used it as a hiding-place. They may even have discovered a secret passage and be able to get into the cellars."

"When the house was built the builders never discovered anything of that sort."

"Didn't you tell me you found a freshwater well in one of the casemates?"

"Yes; but do you think that by means of the well they could gain an entrance into the house?"

"More improbable things than that happen," suggested the Doctor.

"In story books, perhaps."

"In fact, also."

"Anyhow, to-night we shall find out," replied Lachesnaye. "And may I thank you, Doctor, for taking so much interest in the affair. . . . I hope that one day I may have the opportunity of doing you a good turn, to show my appreciation."

Quickly, the Doctor retorted:

"Will you do me a favour?"

"Nothing I should like better," replied the young artist.

"Let me come and spend the night at Ker-Yvette."

"I did not like to ask you."

"Then I may?"

"Of course."

"That's exactly what I want," exclaimed M. le Bosser. . . . "Probably nothing will happen. But if it did, I should be frightfully disappointed to have missed an experience which ought to be very interesting."

"I shall expect you to dinner."

"No, I didn't mean that."

"I insist, my wife will be delighted."

"Then I accept."

"At seven o'clock this evening."

"Thank you—*au revoir*."

They parted, one to continue his round to his patients, the other to go home.

On returning home, Lachesnaye learned from his wife that the housemaid, the cook and the chauffeur had decided to leave immediately.

"They said they were alarmed," explained Yvette, "and could not stay in the house. I tried to reason



with them, but it was no good. They were determined."

"Very well, let them go," exclaimed Lachesnaye, nervously.

Then he added:

"But I've invited the Doctor to dinner."

"I can manage very well," said Yvette. . . . "In fact, I would rather not have panicky people about me."

\* \* \* \* \*

The rest of the day passed without incident. About six o'clock the servants departed in an old conveyance hired from the village of Kerné.

"To-morrow," said Lachesnaye, "I will telephone to Paris for other servants. Only we shall have to wait for several days."

"We shall manage all right," said Yvette, who was now quite calm and collected.

"The important thing is that Nannie stays, because of little Jackie. Otherwise I don't care a bit. We can get old mother Leport's daughter to give me a hand. She is quite good. I can do the cooking."

After the three servants had left, the house seemed quite peaceful. About seven o'clock, Harold, James Wilbright's man-servant, arrived.

His master was better and sent to ask if Lachesnaye would lend him some books.

The artist did so willingly.

"Tell Mr. Wilbright that we are all right and that I will see him in the morning."

Harold was just going when the young artist called him back:

"Oh! I forgot to say that Doctor Le Bosser is dining here this evening. If Mr. James wants him he will know where he is."

"I don't think he will," replied the man-servant,

"because, when I left, Monsieur's temperature was normal. And he has ordered a good dinner."

"Splendid; so much the better."

The man-servant went away. Lachesnaye went to rejoin his wife who was busy in the kitchen.

Shortly after the nurse came in from a walk with the baby.

She said:

"I have come in rather early because the wind is so cold."

"Good," said Lachesnaye, adding: "Is little Jackie all right . . .?"

"Splendid, Monsieur, and so lively and intelligent."

Lachesnaye took him up and fondled him tenderly.

"It is very good of you to stay, Anne."

"I could not leave Monsieur and Madame and the little darling."

"We shall not forget you, Madame and I, and will show our appreciation of your behaviour."

"I am only doing my duty, Monsieur," and then she added, smiling at the child:

"They may come, the naughty ghosts, but we won't be frightened of them, will we?"

A little later, as Lachesnaye was coming up from the cellar with bottles of cider and old claret, there was a ring at the door.

It was the Doctor.

"I am a little early, please forgive me. I want to speak to you particularly."

"Come in, Doctor; delighted to see you."

The Doctor jokingly exclaimed:

"Ah! You are a cellar-man, I see!"

"I've got to be; the servants have all gone except the nurse."

"And I practically invited myself to dinner! Oh, how can I apologise to Mme. Lachesnaye?"

"My wife is only too pleased. At the moment she



is cooking the dinner. It is occupying her mind, which is a very good thing."

"Bravo!"

With a rather mysterious air, the Doctor inquired:

"Your charming wife is busy in the kitchen?"

"Yes."

"Then I should like to take this opportunity of speaking to you alone."

"Come into my studio. I will put the bottles in the pantry."

When they went into the studio, Lachesnaye noticed that the Doctor seemed rather pre-occupied.

"Well, Doctor, what is it?" he said. "I hope you have not brought bad news."

"No," replied M. Le Bosser . . . "merely a little *contretemps* . . . rather annoying . . . which is too late to put right. This evening we shall not have the police here."

"Oh, why?"

"Chief Inspector Le Guérec and Police-constable Levidic are both ill."

"That's very odd," ejaculated the young artist. "This morning they seemed very fit."

"Quite! I was amazed myself when I was told, just after lunch, that they were taken suddenly ill—a kind of colic. I went to see them. They are both suffering from some form of gastric poisoning and need care. They will be laid up for several days."

"That's bad," exclaimed Jean. "How could it have happened?"

"Probably from some mussels they ate at lunch. I assure you there is no danger but, with the best will in the world, it is quite impossible for them to come to Ker-Yvette this evening."

"So I sent to the chief officer of the customs . . . it was arranged that he should send two of his men this evening, disguised as fishermen, who were to hide

themselves in the house. . . . He himself, with three more of the men, were to conceal themselves behind the rocks on the shore where they expected the smugglers would try to land. So that, if these mysterious visitors began their tricks, they would find someone to deal with them."

"Doctor, you have arranged it very well."

"I did my best."

"Anyway, we shall not be taken by surprise."

"I hope not."

"You are not sure?"

"Well . . . you see. . . ."

"Why do you hesitate? . . . what is wrong? . . . tell me. . . ."

And then with insistence he added:

"I am not a man to get the wind up."

"I know that—still . . . I don't want to alarm you needlessly. . . . However. . . ."

"Tell me, please."

Solemnly the Doctor proceeded:

"I wondered if the Police-chief Le Guérec and Constable Levidic have really been poisoned by mussels."

"Because?"

"Because . . . !"

The Doctor stopped short. Yvette appeared carrying a tempting dish of lobster.

With a gracious smile she called out:

"Good evening, Doctor, how nice of you to come."

"Madame, I am ashamed . . . two evenings running. . . ."

"Messieurs," cut in the young wife, "dinner is served."



## CHAPTER V

### IN WHICH COMEDY TURNS INTO DRAMA AS TERRIBLE AS IT IS UNEXPECTED

DINNER was over. . . . It had been pleasant and even somewhat gay. Doctor Le Bosser and Jean Lachesnaye had praised Yvette's excellent dishes, especially a soufflé au kirsch, which they both, being gourmets, thoroughly enjoyed. . . .

The good cheer and the charm of the lady who prepared the meal had caused an atmosphere of good humour and banished all worry.

One might imagine that all three had quite forgotten the occurrences of the previous night.

Not once had they alluded to them up to the time when, in going into the studio at about nine o'clock, M. Le Bosser remarked:

"I am surprised that the two customs officers have not come yet."

"I suppose," said Lachesnaye, diplomatically, "that they prefer to wait until night before they join us."

"I expect so," said the Doctor, as they sat down in the studio over their coffee and liqueurs. . . . It was an exact repetition of the previous evening, except that Wilbright was not there. An hour passed, during which the conversation continued, full of gaiety and wit. It was interrupted by a ring at the hall door.

Yvette trembled slightly.

"Oh!" she said, with a forced smile; "is it going to begin again?"

"Anyway," Jean jokingly added, "they are starting in good time."

"I expect it is the customs house men," prophesied M. Le Bosser.

"I'll go and let them in," said the young artist.

He went at once only to return a moment or two later. . . . He seemed perturbed.

"It is not the customs house men," said he, "but Harold, Wilbright's man-servant, who has come to ask Doctor Le Bosser to come to his master. It seems he has a high temperature again."

"Oh, dear . . . oh, dear!" grumbled the Doctor. "It is to be hoped he has not got inflammation of the lungs."

And turning to Yvette, he added:

"Will you please excuse me, Madame?"

"Certainly, Doctor."

"I shall not be long. See you later."

Jean escorted his guest as far as the garden and watched him go off with Harold in the direction of Kerné.

It was a dark night with heavy black clouds, very low.

In the distance, above the Isle of Groix, lightning flashes lit up the sky, precursors of a coming storm. The sea, though one could scarcely see it, was very calm. . . . The wind had entirely dropped, and one could hardly hear the monotonous splash of the waves on the shore.

Jean rejoined his wife, who had not left the studio.

He found her pensive . . . the bright look which had previously lit up her face had vanished. . . .

In a nervous voice, which betrayed anxiety, she remarked:



"I don't think the customs men will come now."

The artist made an evasive gesture.

She added:

"We can only wait until the Doctor returns."

"That's so," agreed Lachesnaye.

After a brief silence, he suggested:

"Will you play something?"

Yvette had a very sweet voice and sang to her own accompaniment.

"I should like to," she answered, as she went to the piano.

Just as she sat down, she said:

"I think, as we have no servants, I will take the opportunity, as M. Le Bosser is not here, to clear the table . . . it will leave less to do to-morrow morning."

"That's so," agreed Jean. . . . "I will give you a hand."

"No, no, my dear . . . you stay here quietly and read. I laid the table, so I can clear away."

"As you wish."

They both went to the dining-room. . . . A quarter of an hour later, everything had disappeared on the service lift which communicated with the pantry.

"To-morrow," said Jean, "I will go and get Mother Leport's daughter; she will do the rough work."

"Yes," Yvette replied, "you see, my dear, I haven't managed so badly."

"You've done wonders."

"Now let us go back to the studio and I will sing you something as you asked. What would you like? Something of Schumann's?"

"Please."

They returned to the studio. Yvette played some brilliant *arpeggios*, in order, as she said, to exercise her fingers.

Then her voice rang out clearly, interpreting with

much feeling and good taste the delightful *Amours d'une femme*.

Jean listened, enchanted. . . .

Yvette's face reflected faithfully the sentiments that she sang. She was a true musician.

Under the charm of the music they forgot how the time passed.

They were astonished when, as Yvette stopped for a moment, they heard eleven o'clock strike on the old grandfather clock which stood in the corner of the studio.

"What! Already?" exclaimed Yvette.

"Yes, already," repeated Jean.

Then he added:

"I thought it was scarcely ten. . . . My dear, when you sing I am enchanted . . . see how quickly the time goes."

The young wife spontaneously embraced her husband and put her head on his shoulder.

Jean kissed her.

She queried:

"Why hasn't the Doctor come back?"

And without waiting for an answer, she continued:

"I hope our friend Wilbright is not worse."

"I'm rather afraid," said Jean, "it may be that M. Le Bosser has been obliged to go back to Quiberon for medicine that is urgent."

"That may be so, of course. . . . We must wait."

Yvette took up a newspaper lying on the table and began to read . . . Jean lit a cigarette and stretched himself on the divan.

The young wife, whose eyes ran nonchalantly over the paper, said, after a moment or two:

"It is a nuisance that one cannot telephone during the night. We could have made sure."

"The truth is," replied the young artist, "that in France, especially in the provinces, we have a very



poor service. However, let us be philosophical, we might have worse troubles . . . many people have. Besides. . . . A ring at the bell," said Lachesnaye, breaking off his remarks. . . .

"I suppose it is the Doctor," he added.

He went to open the door. . . . He could not! It was fast . . . as if it were hermetically sealed.

However, there was no bolt on the outside and the lock worked freely from the inside.

In spite of all his coolness, the young artist suddenly felt beads of perspiration on his forehead.

Seized with alarm, Yvette asked:

"Can't you open the door?"

"No!" replied Jean, miserably, as he tried again.

"I don't know what's the matter with it!"

At that moment the electric light went out. The young wife gave a shriek. . . . The bell rang again violently. . . . There were bangs on the upper floor as loud as those of the previous night. . . .

"Jackie, our little one . . . my God!" moaned the young mother in the darkness.

Lachesnaye called out:

"This is not the time to lose your head, dear." And loudly he exclaimed to his wife as he lit his lighter:

"Don't give way like this, I beg you."

With the flickering flame in his hand, the artist rushed to the window and opened it. He tried to push back the shutters. But, like the door, they would not open an inch. . . . It seemed as though some powerful forces had sealed the hinges.

Up above the bangs had ceased. There were sounds of stealthy steps going up the stairs.

"I'm afraid! I'm frightened!" murmured Yvette, going to her husband. . . . "Our Jackie . . . our child . . . !"

The sound of the footsteps died away in the direction of the basement. . . . A prolonged chuckling,

terrible, diabolical, came from the hall . . . like a challenge from hell to humanity.

Overcome with terror, Yvette sank, half fainting, on to the divan.

Jean took his revolver from his pocket and prepared to defend himself.

A moment later, another extraordinary thing happened. . . . The window-shutters slowly opened and there was a violent bang on the door which led into the hall.

Jean rushed at it . . . the door gave way. . . . At the same moment the electric light came on.

The hall was empty. . . . Not a sound was heard . . . an impressive silence reigned throughout the house. . . .

Galvanized by maternal love, Yvette, whose only thought was to fly to her child, got up and going to her husband, said to him:

"Quickly, upstairs!"

Up they rushed . . . they were terrified at seeing the nursery door open. . . .

In an instant Lachesnaye switched on the light and went into the room.

Nannie was sleeping soundly in her bed, and the child was in his cot. Yvette bent over the little one, who awoke with plaintive cries. She took him in her arms and at once put her lips to his forehead, when a cry of anguish escaped her:

*"It is not my child!"*

"What do you say . . .?" exclaimed the father, who, in turn, was horror struck.

"Look . . .!" the young wife trembled, holding the baby to her husband. . . . "It is not our Jackie—it is not he."

Overcome with alarm, Lachesnaye looked at the child that his wife held up. Yvette was right. . . . *It was not his little one.* Instead of a fine, lively



little fellow, full of life and vigour, of whom he was so proud, Lachesnaye had before him a poor little weakling, so rickety that it looked as if it had not long to live.

He could not believe his eyes. However, he wanted further evidence. . . .

Glued to the spot, petrified, Yvette remained standing, holding in her arms the child that had been substituted for hers.

Lachesnaye turned to the nurse who lay in a heavy sleep.

"Anne!" he shouted. . . . "Anne!"

As she did not answer he took her arm which was hanging outside the bed and shook it gently at first, then violently. . . .

But nothing seemed to awaken the wretched girl from the lethargic torpor in which she was plunged.

Jean went up to his wife. . . . She was standing still . . . holding the strange child in her arms.

"Hush!" she said to her husband, "don't speak, he has gone to sleep again."

And she rocked the child softly, murmuring:

"Sleep, my little Jackie . . . sleep, my darling . . . . Your papa and mamma are watching over you."

Lachesnaye looked at his wife. . . . Her haggard face did not leave the child . . . there was a slight twitch at the corner of her mouth and in a mournful voice she sang:

"Hush-a-bye, my Jackie, go to sleep, you shall have some cake. . . ."

The poor fellow felt his heart sink. . . . His dear wife, so full of charm and love who, a few moments before had snuggled on his shoulder. . . . His darling Yvette had gone mad.

He noticed still that he was holding his revolver in his hand. Faced with the wreck of his happiness and

a hopeless future, a terrible temptation assailed him . . . to put an end to both . . . together. . . . In a second or two it would all be over. . . .

Was not this solution preferable to the horrible future that lay before them: she hopelessly insane, he in despair, his life ruined. . . . ?

But hardly had this tragic thought passed through his mind, than he revolted against it.

"No! . . . . Not that . . . not that! . . . It would be cowardly. . . ."

"Now, I have two duties to perform: to find my son, and to try and restore my wife's reason."

Yvette put the child in the cot and after kissing him softly, she said to her husband, quite naturally:

"Do not kiss him, you might wake him up. . . . Come along . . . !"

She went out on tip-toe. . . .

Suffering great mental agony, but not daring to say anything, Jean followed her into their room.

Yvette smiled quite naturally. It seemed as though she had completely forgotten the tragic events that had happened, and also the substitution of the strange child, which had given her so great a shock that it had turned her brain.

No wandering in her words nor actions—just a tired look on her face.

"I shall go to bed," she said. "I'm sleepy."

As she undressed, she added:

"Just now I must have gone to sleep in the studio . . . . It is strange . . . there came a break. From the moment Le Bosser went away up to the time I kissed baby, I can remember nothing, absolutely nothing. . . . It is strange. . . ."

Jean realised that a period of pious lies and necessary subterfuges had begun for him.

Affecting a certain cheerfulness, he had the courage to say to his wife:



"As a matter of fact, darling . . . after you had sung some songs from Schumann. . . ."

"Oh, yes. . . . I remember, I sang some Schumann. . . ."

". . . . You came and sat by me on the divan and fell asleep with your head on my shoulder."

"That's it . . . now I remember quite well . . . forgive me for my stupidity. . . . I've had a complete blank."

"You have tired yourself getting the dinner."

"That's it, perhaps . . . the fumes from the stove. . . I've got a headache. . . . A good night's sleep and I shall be better. . . . Did the Doctor come?"

"Yes, but as you were asleep, he did not want to wake you."

"And Wilbright?"

"He is getting on all right."

"The Doctor has gone, has he?"

"Yes, dear."

"That's good, because I'm sure that to-night we shall sleep well."

A quarter of an hour later she was sleeping peacefully.

As for Jean, he spent a terrible night . . . overwhelmed with grief, he could not collect the thoughts which whirled through his troubled brain.

Every minute this awful phrase rang in his ears: . . . "My wife is insane, and my child has been stolen!"

Then he said to himself:

"Will she, from to-morrow onwards, take this child for her own? . . . At any rate she will not suffer and will still be happy!"

He tried to solve the meaning of it all.

"Why have they taken my son and replaced him by a weakling that cannot live?" And continued to try and review the whole situation.

"To-morrow I will talk things over with Le Bosser and Wilbright. They are my friends. I can count on them."

He listened. Yvette still slept. He could not close his eyes.

About six o'clock he heard a noise in the nursery.

... He recognised the nurse's voice. . . .

Quietly he got out of bed and, dressed in his pyjamas, he went through his dressing-room into little Jackie's nursery. Anne, who was opening the window, turned, and seeing Lachesnaye's troubled face, asked:

"Madame is not ill?"

"No, Madame is not ill."

"Then, Monsieur?"

Very pale, Jean sank on to a chair.

Nannie exclaimed:

"I will go and call Madame."

"No, no; stay where you are," and then he added slowly:

"Anne, I know I can count upon you. . . ."

"Of course, Monsieur, anything I can do for you and also for Madame and the little one, I will do with all my heart, I promise you."

"Thank you, Anne. . . . Now I will tell you. . . . Something awful happened here last night!"

"Surely not, Monsieur . . . !"

"It is hardly believable. . . ."

"And I slept so soundly . . . too soundly . . . I am not yet quite awake."

"Look in the cot. . . ." said Jean, his voice trembling with emotion.

The girl bent down, trembled, and uttered a cry.

"Hush . . . silence . . . !" said Jean.

Almost fainting, Anne exclaimed:

"It is not little Jackie, Monsieur; no, it is not Jackie."



And between her sobs, she added:

"It is a strange child that someone has put in his place whilst I was asleep. . . . I cannot believe it! . . . How could it have happened? . . . How could anyone steal a little baby like that?"

"They might have killed me instead? . . . How could they do it without waking me? Oh, the monsters! . . . Surely, Monsieur, you don't think it is my fault . . .?"

"No, Anne, certainly not, I could never believe you guilty of so terrible a crime."

"Thank you, Monsieur! . . . And poor Madame. . . . What will she say? . . . It will send her mad. . . ."

"My dear Anne," said Jean, broken-heartedly . . . "it has already done so."

"My God!"

In a few words Lachesnaye told her what had taken place, how he and his wife had discovered the substitution and how it had affected her.

"And to think I heard nothing at all. The robbers must have made me breathe or drink some drug . . . but how could they have got in without being seen?"

"All that is in the hands of the police," explained Lachesnaye. "Let us give our attention to what is most necessary. Don't forget when Madame comes, if in her wandering mind, she persists in mistaking the strange child for her own, don't deceive her."

"I won't forget, Monsieur."

"Humour her."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"That will give me time to search for my son."

"And may merciful Providence give him back to you."

"Be sure, Anne, that you do not fail me."

"I will try, but it will be difficult to pet and fondle a strange baby."

"Humour the delusion of my unhappy wife until Jackie is found."

At that moment Yvette in *désabille* entered the nursery.

"Good morning, Nannie," said the young wife, addressing Anne who had taken the child on her knee.

"Has baby slept well?" she inquired.

"He has been rather restless," said the girl, hesitatingly, "and this morning he is not very well."

Yvette gazed at the child.

"He does not look himself," said the mother.

"Yesterday he was so well."

"Babies are up and down in no time."

"That's true. Do you think he has caught a chill. . . ? How he has altered!" Mme. Lachesnaye murmured sadly, "I should hardly recognise him."

Jean breathed more freely. . . . The illusion continued. . . . There was still time.

Thinking it was wise to speak, he said: "Is baby ill?"

"Look at him, poor little fellow," replied Yvette. "How he has changed in a few hours!"

"That often happens with very young children. I don't think it is serious. Anyway, I'll 'phone for Doctor Le Bosser to come."

He went to the telephone. A trembling voice at the other end of the line, evidently the maid's, replied that the Doctor had not been home all night and that she was very worried.

Jean was astonished. Something must have happened to him. Perhaps a trap set by somebody who wanted to stop him coming back here. . . . "I'll ring up Wilbright," he said to himself.



He got his number immediately.

"Hello! old fellow, how are you?"

"Better, much better. It was only a touch of malaria. I shall get up directly. And how are you?"

"Something very serious has happened during the night that I cannot tell you over the 'phone."

"What do you say?"

"It is something unbelievable."

"In half an hour I will be with you."

"Thank you. I want your help and advice very badly."

"As serious as that?"

"Yes, I am in very great trouble."

"You frighten me."

"Excuse my asking you, my dear James, but did Le Bosser come to see you last night?"

"Yes, I sent for him, I felt pretty bad. . . . After telling me it was nothing to be alarmed about he went off to you at Ker-Yvette."

"Yes, but he never came, and just now his maid has told me over the 'phone that he has not been home."

"You don't mean that, really?"

"It's quite true, my dear James, but that is only an episode of this terrible drama."

"I'll come to you at once."

"Thank you, old friend."

Lachesnaye was waiting impatiently for the arrival of his friend, when Yvette appeared.

"Have you telephoned for the Doctor?" she inquired.

"Yes, my dear."

"Is he coming?"

"Yes," answered the artist, who felt it his duty to lie.

"Jackie seems a little better, so whilst we wait for the Doctor I will go and dress."

"That's right," answered Jean.

She hurried out, appearing preoccupied and sad, but perfectly normal.

Jean, left alone, became absorbed in thought. After about a quarter of an hour the hall door-bell rang.

He went to open it, expecting to find Wilbright. . . .

He uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Doctor!"

M. Le Bosser, his shirt all crumpled, his clothes dishevelled, bare-headed and white-faced, stood before him.

"Yes, it is I," he said in a husky voice.

"I am glad you have come . . . your maid told me you had not been home once yesterday."

The Doctor replied:

"Quite true, I have just had an extraordinary adventure."

"And so have we."

"I thought as much. Not too bad I hope?"

"Yes."

"Mme. Lachesnaye?"

"No, Jackie."

"Your little boy?"

"He has disappeared."

"What!"

"But come in Doctor . . . come into my studio."

And Jean led in the Doctor, saying in a broken voice:

"If you only knew how wretched I am!"

Once in the studio, Jean, giving way to his grief, exclaimed:

"My dear friend, you cannot imagine it, it is

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terrible. My little one has been stolen and my wife has lost her reason."

And putting his head in his hands the poor fellow began to sob like a child.

"Calm yourself!" said the Doctor, quietly, "and tell me exactly what has happened."

"It is too terrible," reiterated Lachesnaye, "so uncalled for, so horrible, that I can hardly believe it has happened."

A voice with an American accent was heard. James Wilbright, having found the front door open, had come through the hall into the studio. Coming up to Jean who had not had the energy to rise, he said, noticing his great distress:

"Something frightful has happened?"

"Incredible!"

Then pulling himself together and mastering his grief the young artist added:

"Forgive me for this exhibition of weakness, but I have had an awful night."

"Another!" exclaimed the American.

"The other was nothing compared with his. You can judge for yourself."

And he told Le Bosser and Wilbright all that had taken place since last evening.

The two listened with expressions of amazement. When he had finished, the Doctor and the American exchanged looks which expressed both sympathy and astonishment.

Le Bosser was the first to speak:

"In my opinion," he said, "there is not a shadow of doubt. It is a regular plot to rob you of your child and substitute another."

"The perpetrators, because there certainly must be more than one, have begun by getting rid of all those who were likely to hinder their criminal under-

taking. . . . The servants, officers . . . and finally, myself. . . .

"I must first of all explain to you my experiences.

"Yesterday evening, after leaving you, my dear Monsieur James, as I have said, I got back to Ker-Yvette by following the road which leads up to the house, when I tripped over a wire which had been stretched across the path about eighteen inches from the ground.

"I fell head foremost. I was picking myself up, but as I was doing so, I received a violent blow on the back of the head, which felled me to the ground again, and I immediately became unconscious.

"What happened after that I can't say. When I came to my senses, about an hour-and-a-half later, I found myself in a little cave at the foot of the cliff, five-hundred yards from here, into which the sea only comes at spring tides.

"That there has been a plot is clear."

"Doctor," broke in Wilbright, "may I suggest an alternative?"

"By all means," said Le Bosser.

"Don't you remember that last Christmas, at my house, phenomena of the same kind occurred as those that have preceded the abduction of little Jackie. . . ?"

"Quite true. . . ."

"However, in my case, there was no child to be stolen . . . the perpetrators of that crime did not think of abducting our friend's child, because he was not born."

The Doctor replied:

"From cause to effect your reasoning is sound . . . but who knows that these mysterious bandits, having heard tell that there were ghosts in the neighbourhood and having learned of the supposed visit that



they made here, have not been inspired by that fact and organised and arranged the whole of this extraordinary affair so as to camouflage their hideous crime."

"That is quite possible," the American admitted.

"What shall we do?" asked Lachesnaye, bitterly.

"In my opinion, the most important thing," continued the Doctor, "is to let Mme. Lachesnaye believe that it is her own child . . . if not, there is a grave risk that this partial mental derangement, which is curable, may turn into lunacy that may prove hopeless. Forgive me, my dear Lachesnaye, if I speak with brutal frankness, but it is my duty, and to you above all I would speak the truth."

"I thank you!" exclaimed Jean, shaking the Doctor's hand.

Then the Doctor went on:

"This child, you tell me, seems ill?"

"Very ill," replied the artist.

"I'll go and see him, examine him and do what I can . . . because it is very vital that he should live, at any rate until we find the other, and that as soon as possible. It is no fault of this poor child that he has been brought here. If we can save him we must."

"Very well!" agreed the American, who showed unusual feeling.

"But the chief thing is to get Jackie back. . . .

"I ought to tell you, my dear Lachesnaye, that you have a very good trump card in your hand. . . .

"Since the end of July, the greatest detective of our day, including even the American detectives, Monsieur Wilbright—I mean the celebrated Chantecoq—has rented, under the name of M. Dupont, a small house at Kerhostin where he is spending his holiday incognito. I know him personally . . . we met at

the front in 1914. . . . He had been brought in to my dressing-station rather badly wounded. . . . I gave him first aid and, lucky for him, was able to stop his hæmorrhage which would have proved fatal. . . . We have been friends. . . . Whenever I go to Paris I pay him a visit, and I persuaded him to come and spend a few weeks' holiday in this district.

"I need not tell you how clever he is . . . who does not know Chantecoq . . . ? Who does not acknowledge his marvellous power as a detective? His deeds are world-famed, but he is also a good fellow, straight as a die, bold as a lion: in fact, a charming man."

"And do you think," the young artist asked eagerly, "that he would consent to take up this case?"

"Why not?"

"What do you think about it, Wilbright?"

The American replied:

"I know, as our old friend Le Bosser says, this Chantecoq is a very remarkable detective. . . . But don't you think that it would be better to apply at once to the police?"

"That's not my opinion," remarked the Doctor with decision. "I will tell you why: First, it takes time to get the police to move, and that will make the trail more difficult to follow. Secondly, I have no doubt that the detectives that the Rennes mobile brigade will send us are perfectly capable of tackling an inquiry like this, but I am sure, without casting any disparagement on their powers, that Chantecoq is certainly their superior. In your trouble, my dear Lachesnaye, you have the good luck to have close at hand the ace of aces, the king of detectives, the sleuth-hound who has never known defeat. . . .

"If there is anyone who can find your child, it is



he. . . . Take advantage of it. If you like I will go and find him at once."

"I wish you would—now," exclaimed Jean.

"Do you think he'll take it on?" inquired the American.

"I certainly think so," said Le Bosser.

"Explain to him," continued the young artist, "that he can make his own terms."

"He will only make one stipulation: That you do not inform the police."

"Why?" inquired Wilbright.

"Because with Chantecoq, it is a question of principle. . . . He will never take on a case if it has been started or if the police have had it in hand."

"That's funny!" said the American.

"On the contrary, it is quite reasonable," protested Le Bosser. "Chantecoq refuses to compete with his old comrades because he says that too many cooks spoil the broth, and he is quite right."

James did not insist. The Doctor continued:

"In order to save time, I am going to ask you, my dear Lachesnaye, to take me in your car to Kerhostin."

"Give me time to dress."

"Certainly," said Le Bosser. . . . "One more word: knowing my Chantecoq to his finger-tips, I am sure, my dear friends, that he will insist on absolute silence regarding this affair. It will be necessary to warn the nurse to say nothing about it."

"I will answer for her."

"Sure," chipped in the American.

The Doctor added:

"While you dress yourself may I telephone to my servant and tell her I am safe and sound?"

"By all means."

Le Bosser took up the receiver, put through his number and got it at once.

After having explained to his servant that he had

spent the night with one of his patients who was very ill, and that he did not know whether he would be home for lunch, he hung up the receiver when Yvette came in.

"Doctor," she said, "Jean has just told me that you were here. . . . Hallo, Wilbright, you here? Then you are feeling better?"

"Yes, thanks to the Doctor's excellent treatment."

"It was not very serious," said he . . . "a little fever . . . a tablet of quinine was all you needed. . . . And you, dear Madame?"

"Me?" replied the young wife whose face betrayed a certain amount of anxiety. "I am quite well. It is baby who is unwell. He looks ill. . . . He is so changed that he is hardly recognisable."

"Dear, dear!" murmured the Doctor.

"He won't take his food; I feel worried."

"Don't be alarmed. These little things are not serious. . . . Let us go and see him."

"Will you excuse me Wilbright?" said Yvette who seemed to be quite herself.

"Certainly," replied the American. . . . "Besides, I am just going . . . I only came to see how you and your husband were. I shall call again to inquire after little Jackie."

"So long, dear lady."

As soon as James had gone, Yvette took Le Bosser up to the poor little stranger that, in her deranged condition of mind, she thought was her own son. Anne had him on her lap. He kept fretting pitifully. After a glance at Anne, M. Le Bosser saw that he could trust her.

"Undress him and put him in his cot," said the Doctor.

"Poor little fellow," murmured Yvette. "When one thinks that yesterday at this time he was so well and so full of life. . . ."



"It is nothing much . . . children pick up very quickly."

In order to spare Yvette the sight he said:

"Madame, would you be good enough to telephone to the chemist at Quiberon and ask if he has a baby's weighing machine?"

"I'll go at once, Doctor."

It was only a pretext to get her away.

As soon as Yvette had gone the Doctor examined the child.

"With care he may live six weeks but probably not longer. It is vital to keep him alive until we find the other."

"I will do all I can, Doctor."

While the nurse dressed the child again, the Doctor wrote out his prescription and had just finished when Yvette came back.

"Well, Doctor?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing serious . . . teething trouble."

"Already? Then I need not worry?"

"Not in the least."

"You have relieved my mind . . . you are not saying it just to reassure me?"

"Oh, no, I promise you."

She went to the child who was still whimpering, and kissed him on the forehead.

"He is less feverish," she said.

"As I tell you, he is getting on well," exclaimed the Doctor, "and you have a splendid nurse."

"Yes, that is true."

"I will come to-morrow evening if you like, though there is no real need."

Lachesnaye came in.

Yvette rushed to him, saying joyfully:

"It is nothing, after all."

"So I thought," said the young artist with a non-chalant air.

"I have just written a prescription for your little one. Would you motor me over to Quiberon and bring back the medicine yourself?"

"With pleasure," replied Jean.

"Doctor, I forgot to say that the chemist has no baby's scales."

"Never mind. I'll see to that."

"Thank you, Doctor."

The Doctor and Lachesnaye went off.



## CHAPTER VI

### CHANTECOQ

"VERY well! I agree! For you, my dear Le Bosser, and also on account of the good feeling I have towards you, my dear monsieur, I am ready to break my holiday." And with vigour Chantecoq added:

"This child must be found, and I will find him."

Lachesnaye put out his hand to the detective.

"Monsieur," he said, "I do not know how to express my thanks to you."

"Wait till I have succeeded," said the detective, smiling, his face full of good nature, in striking contrast with his sharply-cut features.

Chantecoq, whom his friends called the King of Detectives, had never been in such good form.

Endowed with a splendid physique and constitution, this man, or rather the superman had, as he said of himself, "Never been knocked out by tiredness, had not come to Kerhostin to rest, for he had no need . . . but for a change."

He loved the sea . . . not for the classical enjoyments that one finds there. . . . He never set foot in a Casino, except to follow some trail. . . . No! Chantecoq loved the sea for itself.

Apart from his friendship for Le Bosser, and the sympathy he had for the young Lachesnayes, it was evident that this tragic and mysterious affair interested him very much.

Usually so sparing in his remarks, he exclaimed, his eyes sparkling:

"Never did I expect that in this out-of-the-way place I should be called upon to take in hand such an extraordinary case.

"I need hardly tell you that I want to get to work at once. May I give you a few words of advice and may I ask you a few questions, even though they may seem almost impertinent?"

"I can have no secrets from a man who wishes to help me to find my child."

"Monsieur Lachesnaye, do you know if you have any enemies?"

"None."

"This is said without meaning to flatter you. You are a painter of talent and you are very successful and your name is well known. Don't you think this success has inspired jealousy amongst some of your *confrères*?"

"Possibly," admitted the young artist, "but there is not one who would be capable of such a dastardly act."

"One other question. . . . Before you were married, had you any, what you may call, 'little affairs'?"

"None of any importance and certainly none that left any bitterness."

"Good! Can you tell me if before you married Mme. Lachesnaye whether she had had offers of marriage?"

"Yes, by a business man's son . . . who was afterwards killed in a motor accident."

"No other?"

"No."

"You are quite sure?"

"If there had been anyone else I should know. My wife is loyalty itself."



"Then we can dismiss the idea of spite.

"Blackmail? I don't think so. It is too dangerous and too liable to boomerang back.

"One more question M. Lachesnaye."

"At your service M. Chantecoq."

"Apart from your Doctor, your nurse and M. James Wilbright nobody knows about what happened last night and the abduction of your boy?"

"Nobody," said Jean.

"I hope that, on account of Mme. Lachesnaye and also in the interest of this inquiry, you will not say a word about it. I want my hands quite free and no interference either official or officious."

"You can certainly rely upon me," remarked the Doctor.

"Also upon the nurse," added Jean. "I will guarantee that."

"And what about James Wilbright?" inquired the detective.

"He is quite reliable," said the artist. "I first knew him many years ago when I was a student in Paris. He is a charming fellow in every way. We have never had the slightest disagreement. He is one of my very best friends."

"Have you told him that you were coming to see me?"

"I never thought of keeping it from him."

"Ah, well, Monsieur Lachesnaye, I must ask you to tell him, as soon as you can, that I have not been able to comply with your request, for the simple reason that I have been suddenly seized with an attack of gout which will keep me in bed for several days."

Seeing that his remarks had greatly astounded Lachesnaye, the king of detectives continued:

"Don't think I distrust this American. Your testimony is enough for me to regard him as a

perfectly honest man, as a gentleman. Maybe he is married?"

"No, Monsieur Chantecoq, Wilbright is a confirmed bachelor. I should not be surprised if he has had some secret and unfortunate love affair."

"Ah, poor fellow! . . . Anyway, he has servants?"

"A man-servant, Harold, also an American, an honest chap, who is very fond of his master and is very faithful to him. He has also a cook, a French woman, a Breton from Landévent. . . . that is all."

"Quite so. . . . Has M. Wilbright many callers?"

"Very few."

"No matter," said the detective . . . "a man-servant, a cook, . . . too many ears and eyes open for me."

"Very well, M. Chantecoq, I will tell Wilbright that I cannot get you."

"Then," remarked Le Bosser, "he will ask why you have not informed the police."

Chantecoq smiled. Then he replied:

"Your objection is good. My dear Doctor, I had thought of that: M. Lachesnaye must tell Wilbright that he has lodged a complaint at Vannes and that two detectives from Rennes have been put on to the job. . . .

"But let us get on. . . . You tell me, M. Lachesnaye, that your servants left you yesterday?"

"Yes, Monsieur Chantecoq."

"Well, what do you think if I suggest that I enter your service as an indoor man-servant . . . and I get you, at the same time a really good cook. . . . ?"

A little astonished, the young artist replied:

"Why, M. Chantecoq, I should accept . . . because I think that if you made this proposal it is a subterfuge that you are going to use in the search you intend making at my house."

"You are right . . . you agree?"



"With pleasure."

"Now," continued the king of detectives, "we must explain our arrival to Mme. Lachesnaye who, especially, must not suspect our identity."

"That will be rather difficult!" remarked Le Bosser.

"On the contrary, nothing easier," exclaimed the detective that no obstacle seemed to daunt.

"You must tell Mme. Lachesnaye and everyone you know that we were both in service . . . at Carnec and that we have left our place because we were very badly fed and that the mistress was very difficult to please.

"If you don't mind I shall call myself 'Augustin,' and the cook will be Armandine.

"As to references: I have been in service with a lawyer in Paris, an editor of a newspaper at Lyons, a member of the Academy Française, and the Archbishop of Rouen. As for Armandine, you can just say that she is my niece . . . not of Chantecoq, but, of Augustin. Indeed, I will introduce you to her. . ."

Lifting a *portière* he beckoned to a young man in the adjoining room sitting at a table. He had a fountain-pen in his hand and was reading a sheet of paper covered with shorthand notes.

He was short, slim, sharp-eyed, alert, with the general appearance of a jockey. He got up at once and went to Chantecoq, who murmured something in his ear.

He smiled and looked both surprised and amazed.

Then puffing out his cheeks as if he were going to blow out a candle, he nodded, showing that he had understood.

Then he came into the room following the detective who introduced him to Lachesnaye:

"Armandine, your future cook."

Armandine bowed to his new master, saying:

"I hope that Monsieur will be satisfied with my efforts."

Chantecoq hastened to explain:

"Your future cook, dear Monsieur, is my brilliant secretary, Meteor, my highly-esteemed collaborator.

"We will both arrive at Ker-Yvette at . . . it is now ten o'clock . . . shall we say three this afternoon?"

"Certainly, M. Chantecoq. . . . I will go to Quiberon to buy some medicine and provisions . . . then I will go back to my house and wait for you. May I ask if you are hopeful that you will succeed in elucidating the mystery?"

"If I were not, I should certainly not have taken on the job."

Le Bosser remarked:

"When my dear Chantecoq says he is hopeful, that is as good as saying that he is sure he will succeed."

"Let us not be too sure. Nothing is impossible, everything is difficult. That is all we can say."

He shook hands with his two visitors and went with them to the door of the fisherman's cottage, transformed into a villa, where he was spending his holiday.

Going back to the room to Meteor, he said:

"While I think matters over, you go upstairs and get out, first, the dummy figure that represents me; then the clothes necessary to transform me into Augustin and you into Armandine."

"Very good, sir."

"Hurry up."

Meteor, no doubt with the idea of justifying his name, disappeared with marvellous rapidity.

Left alone, Chantecoq rang the bell.

A man-servant, a thick-set man who, in his white apron had a somewhat military appearance, came in almost immediately.

He was an old soldier who—during the War had



served under Chantecoq who was mobilized in 1914 as a captain in an infantry regiment. There was therefore a bond of friendship between them.

At the front they had saved each other's life.

"Gautrais, old boy," said the detective; "I want to tell you I am going to be ill."

"You, Monsieur? Surely, that can't be so! You never seemed better."

"That does not say that I am not to have an attack of gout."

"Is Monsieur suffering now?"

"Oh, no."

"Then how can Monsieur tell in advance?"

"Because I've got to have it."

Gautrais rolled his eyes in amazement.

"Don't be alarmed," exclaimed the detective. . . .

"I have a case on hand that is very interesting, one of the most mysterious I have ever known."

"Really!"

"That's a fact."

"Then we shall go back to Paris?"

"No, it is here—at present at any rate . . . but it is vital that no one should know that I am engaged upon it. I am going to pretend to be ill."

"Meteor is busy getting out my dummy that I put in my bed whenever I want people to think that I am laid up and I want to be elsewhere. As soon as Marie-Jeanne comes back from the market at Auray, explain things to her."

"I need not say more. . . . You follow me, don't you?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur."

"I thought so."

"Will Monsieur have lunch?"

"Yes; immediately after I shall disguise myself and be off."

"Have you to go far?"

"Villa Ker-Yvette, near Kerné. We shall walk."

"It is a long way."

"Good for the digestion!"

"So you know the idea, until further orders, I have the gout, and am confined to my bed."

"And M. Meteor?"

"He has gone for a motor-trip with some friends."

And patting his man-servant on the shoulder Chantecoq added:

"As soon as Marie-Jeanne comes back, tell her to make me a good lunch, because I fancy that the cooking at Ker-Yvette will not be so good as hers."



## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST MOVE

TOWARDS three o'clock, a man about sixty, simply but neatly dressed, with hair turning white, a prominent nose, face a little wrinkled, and whiskers that head waiters used to affect in smart restaurants, rang at the door at Ker-Yvette.

He was accompanied by a woman equally neat in appearance, wearing a hat perched on her head; a pair of spectacles on her nose, so that it was difficult to guess her age.

The two had with them a suitcase. Lachesnaye came to the door. He stood for a moment astonished. Indeed, if he had not been warned that Chantecoq and Meteor were coming at that time, he would never have recognised them under these disguises as the king of detectives and his faithful secretary.

A knowing wink from the detective gave him the tip. He immediately showed the two sham servants into his studio.

"It is simply marvellous," he said as he looked at them, "and I defy anyone to recognise you."

Chantecoq looked at himself in the glass.

"Not too bad, is it?"

"I will introduce you to my wife," said the young artist.

"You have warned her?" whispered the detective.

"I repeated to her just what you told me. . . . She

offered no objection. . . . The little one that she still thinks is her son, seems better. He certainly looks better and my poor Yvette is very pleased. You will see, no one would ever suspect that she. . . ."

He stopped short . . . his emotion overcame him.

"Come," said Chantecoq, "you must not show any signs of distress."

"I promise."

"Good. It will not be for long I hope. By the way, about five o'clock will you take Mme. Lachesnaye out for a run in the car? I want to make some investigations without being disturbed."

At that moment Mme. Lachesnaye came in. She seemed quite calm and self-possessed.

After looking at her future servants with a kindly expression she said:

"My husband says you wish to enter our service."

"Yes, Madame," said Chantecoq. Meteor also bowed acquiescence.

Yvette continued:

"I hear that you have good references?" Chantecoq put his hand to his pocket, but Mme. Lachesnaye stopped him.

"You need not show them to me, my husband has already seen them. What is your name?"

"Augustin Teillay, and my niece, who is my sister's child, is called Armandine Pélaprat."

"I will show you your rooms."

"Thank you, Madame."

"Have you any luggage?"

"Yes, Madame. We left it at the station at Quiberon. Armandine will fetch it, if she may."

"Certainly. Unpack what you need and then come to me in the studio and I will explain your duties to you."

Yvette went to join Jean who was still waiting in the studio.



"They seem quite satisfactory," said the young wife. "I think you have been fortunate."

And going up to the young artist, she said:

"You have managed splendidly, I am delighted."

"My darling," murmured Jean, who, carried away by his wife's soft voice, forgot for a moment the drama of the situation. Unintentionally Mme. Lachesnaye brought him back to reality.

All of a sudden, with her forehead wrinkled and her eyebrows knitted, she said in a strange tone:

"It is curious."

"What?" said Jean with a qualm.

"Somehow I seem to have lost my memory."

The artist's spirits fell.

"I cannot remember," continued Yvette, "why our chauffeur, our cook and our housemaid went away. . . . One would think I was suffering from amnesia . . . I have been trying to remember . . ."

"Don't worry yourself," broke in Lachesnaye.

"Ah! Now I've got it!" exclaimed little Jackie's mother. And breaking into a fit of laughter she called out:

"The ghosts . . . they were afraid of the ghosts. . . ."

Jean was terribly distressed . . . he hoped that she would not remember everything yet.

Yvette continued:

"Could you have imagined they would have been so stupid . . . especially as all is quite normal and nothing further has happened."

Lachesnaye breathed more freely.

"We have also," continued his wife, "been ridiculous. Those stories of Wilbright's have turned our heads."

And Yvette, who had quite recovered her good spirits, added:

"Ah! Maybe he is proud of having upset the house. But I hope not . . . he is such a good friend. . . ."

"Here he is!" said Lachesnaye, who had just caught sight of his friend through the studio bay window.

And leaving his easel he added:

"I'll go and let him in as Augustin is not yet used to the place."

He was mistaken. Hardly had he reached the hall when he met his pseudo-man-servant.

Eagerly, the moment the bell rang, and in the accepted manner, he showed in the American, who seemed a little astonished at his presence.

"My new man-servant," the young artist said simply.

And then he added quietly:

"Everything is going on well, or as well as is possible. I will explain when we are alone."

Lachesnaye took him into the studio and Yvette received him with her customary affability.

"How is baby?" asked the American.

"Much better," replied the mother cheerfully. "This morning I was alarmed . . . he was so ill. . . . He would not take his food. Doctor Le Bosser came and he was most reassuring. . . . Nothing serious . . . it is his teeth."

"I am delighted it has been a false alarm."

"And so am I . . ." answered the young wife, and then added with a pleasant smile:

"You know we've got new servants?"

"I've seen one. He opened the door to me with the dignity of a diplomat's servant at an embassy."

"He seems to me to be rather solemn."

"That is better than too much familiarity."

"I think so, too . . . as to the cook. . . ."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Lachesnaye.

Armandine appeared followed by Augustin, who said:

"We are ready madame. . . ."



"Will you excuse me, Wilbright?" asked Yvette.

"Certainly."

Mme. Lachesnaye said to her two servants:

"I will first of all introduce you to Nannie . . . she is a pleasant girl, very good and very devoted to me, so I hope that you will be nice to her. Then we will go over the house."

After waving her hand to the American and giving her husband a kiss, Yvette left the studio, escorted by Augustin and Armandine.

"Ah, my friend, you cannot imagine how I suffer in wondering what has become of my little Jackie."

"In your misfortune," observed Wilbright, "you have one consolation."

"What is that?"

"Thanks to a regular miracle your wife thinks that it is her boy."

"True; but I am afraid that this half madness that my wife is suffering from may suddenly be aggravated."

Wilbright was silent for a moment.

"Have you seen detective Chantecoq?"

"Yes."

"And is he going to take on the job?"

"No . . . he cannot. . . . He is suffering from an attack of gout."

"I am sorry for him, it is a very painful complaint."

Lachesnaye continued:

"On his advice I immediately rang up the police inspector at Vannes . . . he promised to inquire into the affair. And he kept his word; for at three o'clock a car brought two inspectors from Rennes, who happened to be at Vannes, two clever men. . . . You have just seen them."

"I have?"

"Yes, my dear James. . . . That dignified manservant and that cook."

"What, they are two police detectives?"

"Yes."

"I should never have thought it."

"Aren't they marvellously disguised. They say that to succeed they must work in secret."

"Naturally."

"Only Doctor Le Bosser and yourself know about them."

"You can rely on me. I won't breathe a word to anyone."

After a pause the American inquired:

"Do you or they suspect anyone?"

"No, they have not yet begun their investigations. By the way, will you do me a great favour?"

"With pleasure."

"The detectives have asked me to get my wife away for a couple of hours. When she comes back will you suggest a walk?"

"Better still," said the American, "won't you and your wife dine with me? Maybe your cook-detective is not a first-class chef."

"Thank you—certainly, with pleasure."

"Good, may I telephone to Harold?"

"By all means."

Wilbright rang up his house and gave the necessary instructions. Just as he hung up the receiver, Mme. Lachesnaye came in.

"My dear," said the artist, "our kind friend has invited us to dine with him this evening."

"Thank you, Wilbright," replied Yvette smiling.

"You are very kind, but . . ."

"I cannot allow any 'buts'," cut in the American.

"I insist."

"Yes, but baby," said Yvette.

"You have just told me that he is much better."

"True," answered the mother.



"With a nurse like ours there is nothing to be afraid of," remarked Jean.

"I admit that."

"Very well then, it is settled," said Lachesnaye. "In the meanwhile, what about a walk along the cliffs," suggested the artist, "the weather is perfect."

"I was going to propose the same thing," said the American.

"Very well, let's go," said Yvette, gaily, as she went out to get ready.

"Have I played my part well?" asked the American.

"Perfectly—many thanks."

Lachesnaye had rung for the servant, who came in.

"Augustin, Madame and I are dining with M. Wilbright this evening, so you will have time to familiarise yourself with the run of the house."

Augustin bowed ceremoniously.

"With Madame's permission Armandine has gone to Quiberon to fetch our luggage from the station."

"Very good. If we are late, don't wait up."

"In that case, what time will you require breakfast, and what will Monsieur take?"

"Chocolate and toast at eight, in the studio."

"Anything further, Monsieur?"

"Not for the present. You can go."

Augustin bowed and went out.

The American smiled:

"That detective has missed his vocation. If he had followed his proper calling he would have been the best comedian of his day."

"So I think," replied the artist, "consequently I have great faith in him."

"Let us hope you are justified," said James, rather solemnly.

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as M. and Mme. Lachesnaye had left the house with James Wilbright, Chantecoq went up to the nursery where the nurse was looking after the child.

"Monsieur and Madame are dining out this evening. I have come to inquire what Mademoiselle Anne would like for dinner?"

"Anything," replied the girl, "don't cook especially for me."

Playing his rôle perfectly he replied:

"I gather that one lives well here."

"Yes, it is a very good place."

And she praised her master and mistress at some length.

"Monsieur and Madame ought to be easy to please."

"You are quite right. The others were fools to go off as they did. Monsieur, I suppose, has told you?"

"About the ghosts, yes."

"You are not afraid?"

"When one has a clear conscience one fears nothing."

"That's my opinion, too," Anne agreed, "how did you get to know of this job?"

"Doctor Le Bosser."

"A nice man."

"He often used to come to my last master's house at Carnac. They were very tiresome people, never satisfied. We got fed up, my niece and I, so we asked the Doctor if he couldn't find us another situation and he put us on to Monsieur."

"You were lucky," said Nannie. "This is a rattling good place."

"And a good place for ghosts. . . ."

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No, do you?"

"Well, when one has seen what I have seen. . . ."

"What?"



"Hasn't Monsieur told you what happened?"

"In a vague sort of way."

"Would you like to know?"

"Yes, indeed."

"You will keep it to yourself?"

"You may trust me."

"I have only just caught sight of your niece, but she seems a nice girl."

"Armandine is one of the very best."

"I am sure I shall get on with her. You can spare a minute?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then sit down Monsieur Augustin."

"Call me 'Augustin,' for short."

"And you can call me 'Anne' if you like."

"All right!"

The detective sat down.

"Has Monsieur told you all about his son?"

Without turning a hair the detective replied:

"Nothing at all."

"Really!"

"Monsieur has merely warned us both never to say in front of his wife that Jackie was not well."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"This poor man is even kinder than you know."

"In what way?"

"In many ways."

Chantecoq said nothing. He saw that he had no need to press for information. His fellow servant would divulge all she knew.

And yielding to an overwhelming desire to tell all about it, she began:

"Mind you promise you won't tell anyone, not even Armandine."

"I swear it!" replied Chantecoq solemnly.

And in a low and mysterious voice Anne told him

what he already knew. And she ended up by saying:

"What I have told you is not to frighten you from staying here—on the contrary. . . . Besides, it will not happen again; I have sprinkled the house with holy water that I got from mother Leporte who brought me a whole pint from Quiberon."

"Oh, I am not alarmed," replied the manservant, "the only thing that worries me is the stealing of the child."

Anne went to the cot, Chantecoq also. . . . The little one awoke and began to cry.

Anne took him up to quieten him. But he continued to scream pitifully.

"Perhaps he has a pin pricking him," said Chantecoq.

"I don't think so, but I'll look."

And taking the child on her knee she began to undress him. The child ceased crying.

"Hallo! What is that—these?"

"Where?" said the nurse.

"On his right shoulder."

The detective pointed to a blue ring about the size of a franc, with the initials R. F. forming a monogram.

"That's curious isn't it?" replied Anne. "At first I thought it was a mark stamped on, so I tried to wash it off with soap and pumice-stone; but I could not move it. It seems as if it were tattooed."

"I hardly think so," said Chantecoq, looking at it carefully. . . . "It looks to me as if it were done with an indelible pencil. Have you told Monsieur?"

"No, I have been so upset. . . . Do you think it might help us to discover whose little child it is?"

"That I can't say," said the detective cautiously.

"I am not a police officer."

Fearing that the conversation might take an



awkward turn, and having discovered much more than he had dared to hope, he said:

"I must go now, Anne. My niece will be back directly; besides someone may come to the door."

"I won't stop you, but when you have a minute to spare come and have a chat. . . ."

"Right you are."

"I have taken quite a fancy to you. . . ."

Once on the landing he stopped . . . scratched his ear, a sign that he was thinking deeply.

"Is Anne straight, or is she not?" he murmured to himself.

Then with a smile he added:

"Anyway, I'll soon find out."

## CHAPTER VIII

### JEAN-MARIE

CHANTECOQ, very satisfied with the result of his conversation with Anne, went to his room. To use his own expression, he wanted to put his thoughts in order.

He sat down at the table and began to reflect. He reviewed in his mind all the facts that he had so far discovered.

He lit his pipe which always seemed to inspire him in the elucidation of his problems.

After thinking hard for a short while, he asked himself these questions:

"Why has this child been stolen? Why has it been replaced by another? Lachesnaye's statements seem to prove that either spite or jealousy must be the motive of the crime.

"Here are the salient facts. . . . A child that apparently cannot live has been substituted for a healthy one. . . . Suppose it died. . . . What then? The perpetrators could not possibly have foreseen that Mme. Lachesnaye would believe that the child was hers. . . . Wait!"

The detective puffed at his pipe.

"It would be out of the question to suggest that Madame herself is party to the affair. However, I must consider every possible solution without fear or prejudice.

"Suppose that Mme. Lachesnaye, instead of being



an irreproachable wife is really an out and out hypocrite. Could she have been unfaithful and know that little Jackie is not her husband's child but her lover's? Suppose it were so, and the lover has insisted that she must change the boy, and she has agreed . . . ? That would account for this comic ghost business and also this sudden attack of amnesia. . . . And then . . . ?" With a shrug of his shoulders, Chantecoq added:

"Surely not. . . . How could I possibly entertain such a supposition? Besides, if that were the case why should they have substituted such a miserable little child? And the two initials R. F. on the shoulder? That savours too much of the old romances and melodramas."

So, bowing before an imaginary person, he added:

"Poor little Mme. Lachesnaye, I humbly apologise. I won't do it again, I promise you."

Then with another draw at his pipe, he said:

"Try again, my boy!"

Walking over to the window and gazing out at the sea he became deep in thought. After some moments a smile lit up his face and he muttered to himself:

"This time I think I've got it. . . .

"If I am not mistaken the whole thing turns on money. Someone has a child who will inherit a fortune. If the child dies the fortune may pass into other hands. The child falls seriously ill. . . . The doctor says it cannot live. . . . What are the parents to do? If they have an elastic conscience . . .

"They decide to substitute a healthy child who will live to inherit.

"Then. . . . How can they get rid of the other? Hasten its end . . . ? No, they would shrink from that. However, that is detail. . . .

"It is evident that little Jackie's abductors have

not chosen him casually. . . . A healthy boy was essential. . . . A child of good stock. It is obvious that the Lachesnayes are known to them and it is equally certain they know the ins and outs of the house.

"So far, so good. Now to business.

"Before going through the list of the Lachesnayes' friends the first thing to do is to find out how the villains—for they are nothing else—have obtained entrance into the house in order to execute these ghost-like manifestations.

"For that I must wait for Meteor to come back. He won't be long."

Chantecoq was just re-filling his pipe when the door-bell rang.

"Here he is—or rather, she is," said Chantecoq as he hurried to the door. He was right. It was his secretary who, dressed as Armandine, was saying to the driver of a light cart:

"The trunks are there."

"Where shall I put them?" asked the peasant.

"Follow me, my friend."

"My name is Jean-Marie Quellec," answered the Quiberonnais. But you may call me Jean-Marie. Everybody calls me that."

Jean-Marie jumped down from the cart and opened the flap at the back. He took out the trunks and carried them into the house and put them, one into Augustin's room and the other into Armandine's.

"How much do I owe you?" asked Chantecoq of the driver.

"Twenty francs and a glass of wine."

"Here are the twenty francs!" replied the detective, giving a note to Jean-Marie.

"As to the wine, as we have only just come, we do not know where things are. . . . But here is an extra five francs instead."



"Very kind of you, my good fellow," said the driver, "shake hands."

"With pleasure!"

Jean-Marie gave him a hearty grip, saying:

"When you want to go away, all you have to do is to tell me . . . and I will come and fetch your luggage."

"Oh," said the detective, "I think we shall be here some considerable time, don't you Armandine?"

"I think so, uncle."

The sham manservant added:

"The house seems all right. Monsieur and Madame are very nice people. . . ."

"Yes, but . . ." cut in the Breton with a mysterious air.

"But what . . .?" inquired Chantecoq.

"Oh, nothing . . ." replied the driver, retiring into his shell.

"Isn't the food very good?" asked the detective, pretending to be concerned.

"That's all right."

"What is it, then?"

"After all, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you. . . ." And dropping his voice, he spoke with an air of great importance:

"I hear that Ker-Yvette is a haunted house.

"Who told you that?"

"The servants who were here before you."

"Not really?"

Jean-Marie added:

"But I don't believe it, do you?"

"No, not I. . . ."

"And you're right."

"It isn't?"

"And you, Mademoiselle Armandine?"

"I agree with my uncle . . . I think they are old women's tales to frighten the children."

"That's what I've always said," pretended Jean-Marie.

But after a slight pause, during which he scratched his head, he said:

"However. . . ."

"However, what?" queried Chantecoq.

The driver replied:

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if some queer things didn't happen here the day before yesterday."

"What makes you say that?" asked the detective.

"Oh, because. . . ."

With his cautious and distrustful character Quellec obviously hesitated to say more.

"You can speak without fear before us," the detective said, encouragingly; "my niece and I are very discreet and we should never give away a good fellow like you."

Encouraged by this remark, Jean-Marie continued:

"Then, honour bright, you promise you won't tell anyone, not even your employers, if I tell you?"

"Of course not."

"Well, this is it," said the Breton.

"First of all I must tell you that I am not only a driver, but I'm also a fisherman, a lobster catcher. . . . I have a boat at Port-Maria. You don't know Port-Maria? It is one of the harbours near Quiberon . . . the most westerly. On the right, as you go down past the Hoche statue . . . you know where I mean?"

"Yes, yes, I understand," chipped in Chantecoq, who was becoming a little impatient, for he had only one thought . . . to know what sort of a cat the driver was going to let out of the bag.

Jean-Marie continued:

"The day before yesterday, I went out with Ferdinand my boy, and little Gouzac—the son of Françoise Gouzac—whose husband was drowned two years ago. . . . I took him with me because



Françoise Gouzig, who is a kind of relation of mine works in a sardine factory, and is not able to give much time to her boy."

"So then?" cut in the detective in order to bring the fellow back to his subject, for he would meander off it.

"Why, then," continued Jean-Marie, "the evening before last, about eight o'clock, as there was a fresh breeze blowing, and we were in our boat. . . . I have christened her *St. Anthony* because it always happens when you christen a boat *St. Anthony* you never lose a lobster-pot, not even in a heavy sea.

"That is true, mark you, because ever since, two years ago, when I called my 'cobble' that name, I've never lost a thing."

"I daresay," sighed Chantecoq, resigned at length to allow the fellow to ramble on as he liked.

Jean-Marie who was considered to be the best story-teller in the neighbourhood, continued:

"Well, we started off from Port-Maria to set our pots near Madagascar. . . ."

"Madagascar!" exclaimed Meteor. "Good heavens, it is a long way to go and fish for lobsters."

"It is not the Madagascar that you're thinking of," explained Jean-Marie. "It's a little island, or rather a large rock called by that name, which is just opposite Kerné."

Crossing over to the window he added:

"Look, you can see it distinctly from here. On the far side there are some deep holes where there are a fair number of lobsters; in fact it is better. . . ."

Fearing that the garrulous Jean-Marie was going to dilate at great length on the art of lobster catching, Chantecoq chipped in with:

"It was there that you went to set your pots?"

"Exactly," agreed Jean-Marie. "Everything went all right, in spite of the fact that there is always

very little water, we managed very well—every man to his trade you know. You couldn't do my job and I couldn't do yours. Besides, my *St. Anthony* is a very good sea boat . . . M. Lesur it was who built it. . . . Yes, he's a good chap is M. Lesur. . . ."

Chantecoq cut him short with:

"After you had set your pots?"

"We had just got there, Monsieur Augustin, when Ferdinand, little Gouzac and me . . . we saw . . . ah well! we saw what we saw."

"What was it?"

"This is how it happened:

"The weather, which up to then had been very good, began to change, so we made for home without delay."

"What time was that?" asked the detective.

"I did not take particular notice," replied Quéllec, "but it might have been between ten and eleven o'clock at night."

"Yes, go on, tell us please."

"Just as we hauled up the sail to start home, we heard the noise of an engine coming towards us, and I said to the boys: 'Take care she does not run us down. . . . Her engine still kept running, but we could see nothing. . . . When, all of a sudden, little Gouzac, who has sharp eyes and can see in the dark like a cat, said to me:

"'Look, master, it's not a boat, it's a *blue skin*.'"

"That is a shark."

"Yes, I know, I know."

"I strained my eyes and Ferdinand did, too, and we saw a sort of motor launch dash past, about fifty yards away. And what was most extraordinary it seemed to go by itself."

"How do you mean?"

"I swear there was no one in the boat, and it continued on its course without any one to work it. We did not dare to follow it on account of the sunken



were better than anyone about here: 'Your *Cave of the Winds* must be explored,' they said.

"They took, as you suggest, electric torches, and they went into the cave. . . . Well, they never came out."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Meteor.

"I suppose," remarked the detective, "that men were sent to find them?"

"Yes, Monsieur Augustin. . . . The brothers Le Garru, two daring and clever fishermen, but they never came back. . . . And from that time people have been warned not to go into the cave or bathe near there."

"How long ago was all this?"

"About thirty years. And I am no coward," added Jean-Marie, "but if you offered me a hundred-thousand francs I would not go into the *Cave of the Winds*."

"And you are right," agreed Chantecoq. "But I am afraid we have made you waste your time."

"Not at all; I've enjoyed my chat with you . . . maybe I've tired you?"

"Oh, no, you have interested me exceedingly."

"Then, *au revoir* Monsieur Augustin and Mademoiselle Armandine."

"Thank you, Jean-Marie . . . *au revoir*!"

And the good Quellec went off in his cart without the slightest idea as to the identity of his newly-made friends.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NURSE, THE VALET-DE-CHAMBRE AND THE COOK

As soon as Jean-Marie had left the room, Chantecoq, whose face showed great satisfaction, said to his secretary:

"Whilst you were at Quiberon, my friend, I think I have done good work."

"That does not surprise me, chief."

"Not only have I found out the means by which little Jackie was abducted but I think I have discovered the way it was worked."

And Chantecoq continued:

"Jackie was stolen in order to be substituted for a child who was dying and who was heir to a large fortune. The abductors came by the sea, from Lorient, or some smaller port, in a motor boat of the latest type, so that it will be easy to trace . . . landed here . . . and secreted themselves in the *Cave of the Winds*. Thanks to a communicating underground passage which leads from the basements of the old fort upon which this villa has been built, they have been able to gain easy entrance, play their preparatory comedy, and the following day to abduct little Lachesnaye. It is as clear as daylight."

Meteor remained silent. . . . He had made it a rule never to criticise the opinions or orders of his superior officer. Nevertheless, he could not help puff-



ing out his cheeks, which meant, to all who knew him, that he had something important to say.

Chantecoq knew what it meant.

"Meteor, I beg your pardon—Armandine, you want to ask me a question?"

"Yes, chief."

"Go ahead."

"Just now, Jean-Marie said something which rather struck me."

"What?"

"He pretended that there was no one in the launch. . . ."

"He made a mistake, that's all. There were at least four men."

"How do you know?"

"That is the least possible number who could play at ghosts and carry out the abduction of little Jackie."

"Where were they then? Hidden under the bonnet?"

"Not they . . . they were in the boat right enough, only they had dressed themselves in black jerseys and could not be seen at night."

"Chief," replied Meteor with admiration, "you can solve anything, you're a magician."

"Not I! Surely during the two years you have been with me you have discovered that my theories are all based on logic and common sense. . . . But enough said. . . . Let's get busy and unpack."

"That trunk," said Meteor, "holds the costumes, hats, shoes and wigs, and everything for disguise. The other one, in my room, holds various things we may need on our expeditions and exploration when there is danger and difficulty."

"Begin by taking out of it two gas masks, a brace of the soporific pistols, two lamps number six, and rope ladder S.L."

"Yes, chief."

"Hide them in that cupboard that I was tidying when Mme. Lachesnaye came on her round. I will arrange the costumes and wigs so that they are ready to hand.

"Then go to the kitchen and cook some dinner for the nurse. For us two, something light. But be sure to make good, strong coffee, because I fancy we shan't sleep much to-night."

"I understand, chief," said Meteor, puffing out his cheeks. "But my cooking won't be like Marie-Jeanne's—still, I'll do my best."

And the false Armandine, who wore her predecessor's clothes as though to the manner born went out quickly.

Left alone, Chantecoq unpacked the trunk and put the contents carefully away.

That done, he went out of his room, locked the door and put the key into his pocket . . . and rejoined Meteor who was busy with his cooking.

Whilst he was thus occupied, Chantecoq pondered over the conversation that he had had with Jean-Marie.

"The people on that launch must have known, not only the coast, but the villa Ker-Yvette from top to bottom.

"Therefore my inquiries ought to be directed to the Lachesnayes' friends and relations.

"To-morrow I will commence my researches on those lines.

"This evening, the task I have set myself will keep me busy.

"Whilst Meteor continues his cooking let me take a tour round the basement . . . because there is not a shadow of doubt about it. . . . After the master of the house's detailed story it is obvious that the rascals came and went that way. . . . The existence of a secret passage is certain.



"In all probability it leads to one of the caves in the cliff, perhaps even to the famous *Cave of the Winds* that inspired Jean-Marie with such holy terror.

"But what interests me most is whether these mysterious bandits have left any trace which might lead to their identification.

"A little trifle sometimes puts one on the track."

With these thoughts in his mind, Chantecoq, who never left anything to chance, began his search of the basement.

He carefully inspected the kitchen, the scullery, the wine-cellar and the coal-house which led from one to the other by wide, airy passages.

Each of these were quite large, and lighted by big, square windows protected by strong iron bars, so that during the day there was plenty of air and light.

At night they were well illuminated by 50-candle-power electric lights.

The king of detectives sounded the walls very thoroughly, but discovered no sign of hollowness anywhere.

That did not greatly surprise him, for, as he had said to Lachesnaye, if there had been a subterranean passage in the old fort, the architect or the contractor, or his workmen who built Ker-Yvette would have discovered the entrance and would have told the landlord.

"However," argued the detective, a little disappointed, "this secret passage exists, and not only does it still exist, but it has not been blocked up, because the people in the launch made use of it last night. . . . But hang it, where is it to be found?

"Try again . . . !"

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Chantecoq, my friend, a bad mistake . . . a serious one. . . .

"The next time, you must not make a mistake like

that; if you do, you will have your pipe stopped for a week."

His face lit up, he gazed around:

"The well, good heavens . . .! How could I have forgotten the well?"

The detective suddenly remembered that two hours before, when Mme. Lachesnaye had taken him over the basement, she had shown him, in a little corner next to the coal-cellar, the well of fresh water belonging to the old fort which never seemed to run dry.

"This time," he said to himself, "I think I'm on it."

He leant over the circular wall round the well, which was about three feet high.

The water seemed to be from eighteen to twenty feet deep . . . the entrance to the subterranean passage, if it really existed, must be above the level of the water; but the darkness of the place prevented the detective from telling if on the wall there was any sign of an opening or a door which would indicate to the great detective that he was correct in his hypothesis.

Deciding to make further investigations at once, Chantecoq returned to the kitchen where Meteor-Armandine, like a trained chef, was busy cooking a good dinner.

"Give me the key of your room," he said.

"There you are, chief."

The false manservant went at once to his secretary's room, opened the cupboard and took out a thin, strong cord, chose a powerful electric lamp and, hiding them in his pockets, went down to the basement to the well.

After having carefully attached the lamp to one end of the cord, and lowered it slowly into the well, by means of the light he was able to examine the walls.

"Bravo!" he murmured, after a moment or two.

The detective had not been deceived. He had just



seen, about six feet from the ground, a piece of sheet iron which apparently covered an opening large enough to allow a man to creep through.

"I must find out how this opens," he said.

"But I cannot do it without these . . . my case number three has some instruments with which I can force anything, however strong.

"So far, so good . . . I'll go and do justice to my niece's cooking. In the meanwhile we will look after that excellent Nannie."

He went back to the kitchen. Anne was holding an animated conversation with the false Armandine.

"The child is asleep," she explained, "so I have taken the opportunity of coming to see you."

"We were just going to lay your table."

"Already?"

"It is nearly nineteen o'clock."

"Nineteen o'clock?"

"Seven, according to the old reckoning."

"Oh, yes, I shall never get used to the new system. We provincials cling to old customs."

"Perhaps you are right. You are a Breton?"

"No, no . . ." replied Anne, "I come from Havre."

"A nice town."

"Very pleasant to live in."

"I just missed going to stay there."

"With whom?"

"Some Americans."

"What is their name?"

"I don't remember."

The nurse remarked:

"Before I was married I was a housemaid in an American family . . . not at Havre; at Neuilly. They were called Colmadge . . . very rich. There was a husband and wife and a married daughter . . . she was married to a brother of M. Wilbright, a neighbour who comes here every day.

"She died some little time back . . . I saw it in the papers. . . . It seems that she was not very happy . . . Tony, the chauffeur, was with them and he told me that it was thought she had committed suicide. . . . All this is just between ourselves, you understand?"

"Oh, yes."

"That did not surprise me, because Miss Colmadge, when I was with them, was in love with a cinema actor. . . . But the Colmadges were very proud and wanted their daughter to marry into their own class, as they say . . . and money as well. . . . It appeared, however, that Wilbright was not as rich as they thought, and he played the fool and led a fast sort of life.

"Of course, his wife was not happy . . . besides, she had not forgotten her actor. . . . However, three months after her child was born she was discovered one morning, dead in bed.

"They held an inquest and found she had died of heart-disease. Maybe it was true . . . but there, with money, you can arrange anything."

"True," sighed Armandine, looking after the onion soup which was simmering on the stove.

With a casual air, Chantecoq inquired:

"Is it long since Mme. Wilbright died?"

"About three months."

"Ah! And the baby, what became of it?"

"I don't know."

"Your neighbour, the other Wilbright, was he on good terms with his brother?"

"I should think not, because I have never heard him mention his name."

The cuckoo clock struck half-past nineteen.

"Excuse me," said the nurse, "I must go upstairs, I can't leave the little one too long alone."



"I will come up in a minute or two . . . when I have got your dinner things ready. . . ."

"You spoil me!" said Anne. And smelling the odour of the onion soup, added as she went:

"I think I shall like it."

When she reached the ground floor she shut the door behind her. . . .

"Everything is going well, very well. In less than forty-eight hours we shall have found out the truth."

"You have never failed since I have been your secretary."

"And I hope I never shall."

Meteor lifted the lid of the saucepan and stirred the soup with a wooden spoon. . . .

"It's ready."

"Then I'll go and lay Anne's table," said Chantecoq.

"Right, chief."

"Call me 'uncle.'"

"Very well, uncle, it's ready now."

"Yes, nephew . . . there I've made a mistake. . . . Yes, *niece*."

Chantecoq served the nursery dinner so well that Anne remarked:

"My husband will be very pleased when I write and tell him how I am being spoilt."

"Oh, yes; you are married?"

"To a stoker in the Transatlantic Company. He was doing well . . . and we were very happy . . . then one day he caught a chill and developed . . . what do you call it?"

"Pneumonia?"

"Yes, and they sent him to a sanatorium. . . . So I had to come out as a nurse to make ends meet, and I've put my baby with some people at Bolbec. . . . Ah, well, it can't be helped. . . . But I mustn't stop you with my stories. . . ."

"Is there anything else you want?"

"No thank you, Augustin."

"A little coffee?"

"Never in the evening, it prevents me from sleeping."

"Then I'll say 'good night.' "

"Good night, Augustin, and give my compliments to Armandine."

When Chantecoq got back to the kitchen and tasted the soup, he said:

"Anne sends her compliments and I add my own. . . . You are an excellent cook."



## CHAPTER X

### THE CAVE OF THE WINDS

AFTER a good meal Chantecoq and Meteor began to attend to more serious business.

"Leave the washing up," said the king of detectives . . . "we can attend to that to-morrow. We will go to our rooms. . . . Pretend to go to bed. We will put on the things I have got ready and then we will go down and explore the well where I think we shall get at the real truth."

No sooner said than done!

About an hour later, having made sure, when passing her door, that the nurse was fast asleep and snoring, the detective and his assistant, having got rid of their wigs and each put on a jersey and bullet-proof shirt, went down into the basement.

Their gas masks hung from their necks by steel chains . . . they each wore a gymnastic belt with a steel ring attached.

To this belt was fixed a knife in a leather sheath and a special kind of pistol with a heavy butt. Chantecoq had some small paper parcels in his hand. . . . Meteor the rope ladder.

Wearing sandals, they reached the well without making any noise. Chantecoq opened his parcel—it contained two electric lamps fixed to rings, similar to those used by doctors when they examine the ear, nose or throat.

He put one on his own head and the other on

Meteor's. Supplied by two powerful batteries they carried on them they shed a very strong light that could be switched on and off.

Chantecoq fixed the rope ladder to the wall of the well by two steel clamps and let it hang down to the bottom.

"I want to see what is down there," he said.

"You remain here and keep watch . . . and only come down if I call you."

"Very good, chief," replied the secretary.

Having tested his clamps, Chantecoq, with great agility, leapt over the coping and quickly descended some rungs of the ladder.

By the light of his lamp the detective could see that the sheet of iron that he had already discovered on the side of the well was mounted on two hinges which showed that it served as a door to a subterranean passage, as he had truly surmised.

But it did not show any trace of a lock . . . and what perplexed the detective still more was that it was a relatively thin sheet and had only recently been put there, as was proved by certain fresh marks on the stone where the hinges had been fixed and cemented.

"This door evidently works by some secret mechanical means, but it is useless to waste time over a riddle when one can solve it otherwise," said the detective to himself. "One must choose the quickest method. . . ."

"So here goes . . .!"

From a case strapped to his waist the great detective took a pair of small, delicate, but highly-tempered steel scissors. . . . He slipped them under one of the hinges and tried to lever it up. But the hinge did not move.

"It's good stuff of its kind," said the 'tec'. . . .

"We must try something more powerful."



Again he put his hand into the case and this time took out a little box containing a sealed phial and dropper.

Balancing himself with ease on the ladder, he uncorked the little bottle and dipped in the dropper and filled it with a clear, thin liquid which gave off a curious odour. He re-corked the phial, put it back into its box, then into the case, pushed the point of the dropper into the joints of one of the hinges and squeezed an indiarubber bulb at the end of the glass tube.

There was a slight sizzling sound as the corrosive liquid bit into the metal. Chantecoq smiled with satisfaction.

Then he murmured to himself:

"My friend Darmont, the great chemist, did not deceive me. . . . His formula is excellent."

Chantecoq put his empty dropper back into the box with the phial. Then, taking up his scissors, again tried to lever up the hinge. This time it moved.

Then he did the same to the other hinge and succeeded.

A few minutes later he forced an opening through which he could put his arm.

After feeling about a little while, he found, behind the unhinged sheet, a bolt which he pushed.

The iron door, which could only be opened by people coming from outside, was now detached and would have fallen into the well if Chantecoq had not skilfully prevented it.

That done, he lifted it up to Meteor who was hanging over the wall at the top.

"I've found the entrance to the subterranean passage," he called out. "I must now explore it."

The secretary exclaimed:

"Then, do you mean to say, chief, that you do not wish me to go with you. . .?"

Chantecoq reflected a moment:

"Maybel"

"Good."

"First go and hide the sheet of iron in the coal cellar."

"Right, chief."

"Then turn the key in the door that leads to the basement and hide the key in one of the ash boxes in the kitchen stove."

"Is that all, chief?"

"Yes, that's all . . . hurry up. . . ."

The last instruction was unnecessary . . . no one could be more agile or more nimble in his movements than the detective's remarkable young assistant.

He vanished like a flash. In fact he not only delighted his master but justified his name—"Meteor."

Chantecoq, standing on the ladder, had not long to wait . . . Meteor returned quickly, saying:

"That's all done."

The king of detectives descended to the hole that he had just discovered and . . . he slipped into it with great ease, showing that he was a skilled gymnast and still remarkably good at this form of exercise.

Copying the movements of his master, Meteor slid down the ladder and, in his turn, crept into the hole.

Chantecoq crawled along. . . . The passage got bigger. After a few yards he was able to kneel and then stand on his feet and walk normally without the risk of knocking his head on the roof of the passage which had been cut in the rock.

Followed by Meteor, he proceeded about a hundred yards. . . . By means of his electric torch he was able to examine the floor and the walls as he went.

For a time there had been nothing abnormal, but suddenly, a sparkling object attracted his attention. . . . He bent down to pick it up. . . . It was a



platinum ring, set with a very fine diamond of the first water.

The detective examined it very closely. Soon, he uttered a cry of satisfaction:

"Ah! ah!" he said; "I think I have made an important discovery."

The ring, in fact, had on the inside, the mark of the celebrated jeweller, Logeron of the Place Vendôme, and, near the signature, engraved in the platinum, the detective read: "No. 2367 R."

The king of detectives who, at various times, had had to deal with lost jewels, knew that this well-known house, like many others, had adopted the system of numbering their pieces of jewellery so that, in case of theft, it might be of assistance to the police.

Chantecoq, who was well known to Logeron, said: "To-morrow, I have only to telephone to the manager and he will give me the necessary information."

And he finished up with:

"That is a good stroke of business. . . . I was not far wrong when I said that I should soon unravel this mystery."

He was on the point of turning back, as he was more than satisfied with this important find. After such a busy day, Chantecoq would have been perfectly justified in turning tail, and going back to the villa Ker-Yvette to take a well earned rest; but he was not one of those to be satisfied with an initial success, however great it might be. . . . He always wanted to probe things to the bitter end.

His motto was:

*Strike while the iron is hot.*

So, followed by Meteor, he continued his search.

"If I am not making a mistake," he said to him-

self, "this passage ought to come out close to the *Cave of the Winds*, and who knows? . . . perhaps . . . in the cave itself . . . so, look out."

Chantecoq and Meteor went forward another hundred yards . . . then the passage began to descend rather steeply.

"We are getting near," said the great detective, "we must keep our eyes open."

Already they could hear the noise of the sea, not far off, as it beat against the now celebrated cave.

Above the ceaseless noise of the waves, there arose, at regular intervals, moans and sobs of grief, or whistling screams of rage, that echoed like cries of distress.

Chantecoq exclaimed:

"That's what the visitors at Ker-Yvette heard."

"Chief, do you think that so far away. . .?"

"Meteor, my boy," replied the detective, "you are a good cook, but you are a poor student of physics. . . . If you had studied science a little more, you would know that a passage like this forms a kind of speaking tube and M. Lachesnaye and his household could easily have heard this terrible concert."

"Chief, you are right, as usual."

Chantecoq moved forward . . . but this time only a few steps.

The passage, after forming a right-angled elbow, stopped short at a staircase cut in the rocks and the steps disappeared in the darkness.

The detective and his assistant were about to descend the staircase when suddenly, about twenty yards in front of them, a light flashed out like lightning, followed by a detonation like a sharp crack of a whip. A bullet whistled past Chantecoq's ear and hit the rock on the level of his head.

"Down," cried the detective, extinguishing his torch.



Immediately he added:

"The brigands have missed the ring and have come to look for it. They evidently saw our torches . . . and fired in our direction; when it would have been so easy for them to have waited for us in the shadow at the foot of the stairway and done their business quite easily without being disturbed by anybody."

Chantecoq took the peculiarly shaped pistol which hung on his belt, and patiently, with his finger on the trigger, awaited events.

Presently, down below, he saw a tiny light shining . . . like a star reflected in the water.

By degrees, the light grew bigger and bigger, and clearer . . . it was an electric torch, but not so powerful as those carried by the detective and his assistant on their heads.

Chantecoq did not move. And Meteor, who always imitated his master in everything, did not stir a muscle.

The light came slowly nearer, then stopping for a moment, it continued, like a will-o'-the-wisp, slowing up. . . .

When it was about a dozen yards from the detective, who was lying flat on his stomach, he suddenly switched on his torch which threw its light down the stairway.

Chantecoq instantly saw two men, standing on the steps, each dressed like himself in a black jersey, and masked. One was holding an electric torch; the other a revolver.

The first had not time to extinguish his torch, nor the second to fire his revolver. . . .

Before they had time to recover from their surprise, Chantecoq pressed the trigger of his strange pistol twice . . . and without a sound the two men fell backwards, tumbling down the stairway and disappearing into the darkness.

An instant afterwards, the detective and his assistant heard a double "plunk," telling them that the two assailants had taken a plunge into the deep water.

"Good!" exclaimed Chantecoq. . . . "It is to be hoped that they do not drown. . . ."

And he added:

"It would be indeed bad luck to have invented a pistol which would kill one's assailants humanely, especially in this instance, as I wish particularly to find out more about them. . . . However, let me go and see. . . ."

Down below, the groans and cries went on unceasingly accompanied by the deep moaning of the sea.

Without the least hesitation, Chantecoq descended the steps followed by Meteor who had also switched on his torch. They reached the subterranean grotto into which, by a large opening, the boiling sea rushed in.

The noise was tremendous.

Chantecoq and Meteor turned their lights on to the abyss. At their feet was a huge cauldron of water. . . . No bodies could be seen on the surface. Undoubtedly they had been sucked immediately to the bottom, probably by a current which seemed to flow madly into another subterranean cavern, which was naturally impossible to get at.

Chantecoq said:

"Anyhow, we have solved the mystery of the *Cave of the Winds*. . . . this grotto, has served as the entrance to the secret passage that we have just come through, which, for centuries, has been a means of communication between the old fort and the sea.

"From the shore one can enter it at low tide, and in order to get out one has to wait until the tide is down.

"Now, how is it that the poor devils who have tried to explore this *Cave of the Winds* have never returned?



It is quite simple. When, taking advantage of the low tide, they entered the grotto the same way as our two assailants, a strong wind blew out their torches and, stumbling in the darkness, they rolled down into the abyss and ended up by falling head over heels into the water. . . .

"However, these two rascals that I have just, unintentionally, sent to join the adventurous tourists, fishermen and others who have committed the unpardonable imprudence of trying to pry into Nature's secret, are evidently well acquainted with the dangers they run in entering so dangerous a place, and have no doubt taken all necessary precautions, seeing that twice they have succeeded in reaching Ker-Yvette without accident; the first time to perform those various phantom-like performances, the second, to abduct poor little Jackie.

"Feeling quite sure of themselves, they have tried it a third time, but have fallen to shots from my soporific pistol.

"However, I did not realise that at the bottom of this staircase there was a ravine . . . and it is certain that they would have been much more value to me if I had taken them alive. . . . Anyway, I have this valuable ring which will give me the address of the culprit for whom I am searching."

And, turning to Meteor, who was gazing earnestly into the turbulent water under the light of the torches the king of detectives snapped out:

"Useless to worry with that—those two fellows have been carried under the rocks by the current and it is a hundred to one against our ever seeing them again. . . .

"Then we'd better go to bed."

Then he added jauntily:

"This time, Meteor, you go first. . . . You show the light and I will take the rear-guard."

"Right, chief."

Meteor went up the stairway slowly . . . Chantecoq gave a last look at the abyss. The tide had begun to ebb. The terrible symphony was becoming more *piano*.

As he came near the entrance to the well, Meteor who, owing to the lowness of the roof was crawling on his stomach, gave a cry of surprise:

"Hi! chief," he shouted to Chantecoq who was still standing upright.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"A very strange thing."

"What?"

"Someone has put the sheet-iron back."

"What is this joke?"

"The truth, chief . . . now listen!" Meteor hit the iron sheet several times with his fist and the blows re-echoed loudly.

"And it has been turned round."

"Push back the bolt."

"I can't. It isn't there. The sheet seems as if it has been cemented to the wall."

"Oh! Oh! I did not bargain for this," grumbled the detective; and without appearing the least upset he said:

"Very well, we must look about for the same means of exit as those rascals used."

"Take care," observed Meteor, "that we don't tumble into the water."

"One wants a sailor's sure foot," remarked the sleuth-hound, "and I have it. You have only to follow me and put your foot where I put mine, and you'll be all right."

Chantecoq and Meteor retraced their steps. . . . They reached the abyss without the least difficulty.

The tide was much lower. The "symphony" had ceased completely. They waited a moment until the



opening, through which the water flowed, was quite free. Then they crawled along a sort of ledge that the water had made in the rock. They walked warily, their legs bent, watching each step carefully, and with the aid of their torches they gained their objective and entered the hole without hesitation.

It was a passage twenty yards long which grew larger at the end where there lay a heap of rocks washed by the waves before their violence had died down. As soon as the two detectives saw the reflection of the moon on the sea, they switched off their torches, because they supposed, logically enough, that the two men who had just attacked them would have companions waiting at the entrance of the cave. So they advanced very cautiously; their fingers on the triggers of their pistols.

They crossed a stretch of sand covered with puddles, then they arrived at the foot of the cliff where the path led to the *Cave of the Winds* from which they had just emerged.

They met no one.

Chantecoq said:

"If we had been attacked, that would have done it. Now we must get back to Ker-Yvette."

Mildly Meteor remarked:

"But we haven't got the keys."

"Never mind, we must wake the nurse, but she may take us for the ghosts, and that is not what we want.

"Ah, Meteor," continued Chantecoq, "one would think that this little experience had turned your brain. Even if the doors and windows of Ker-Yvette are hermetically sealed, it will certainly be easier to enter than the subterranean passage where we have just been."

They followed the steep path, climbing slowly, as the night had become rather dark. Two hundred

yards away stood Ker-Yvette, not a light in the windows.

"They have not returned," said Chantecoq. "That's a good thing, for now we shall have time to undress and think over our day's work."

"That may be, chief," replied Meteor, "but I should like to know who put that sheet of iron over the entrance to the passage."

"It was evidently not done to help us in our researches. And more than that, these mysterious scoundrels have got wind that I am on their track, in spite of all the precautions that we have taken. They have spotted me under the disguise of indoor manservant and you as the cook, Armandine."

"In that case, chief," said Meteor, "they must have accomplices in this place."

"Naturally."

"The Nannie, by Jovel!"

"Not so fast, my boy," and the detective added:

"If that were so, it would simplify things. But don't anticipate events."

Meteor reminded him:

"You said, chief, that we had been discovered."

"The putting back of the sheet showed plainly that someone wanted to catch us in a trap, because whoever replaced the iron sheet was convinced that the two rascals would finish us off; but justice has decreed otherwise."

By this time they had reached Ker-Yvette. . . . Everything seemed quiet.

Chantecoq opened the gate and went into the garden.

When the two detectives reached the house, Chantecoq had only to push the door for it to open; he stopped an instant, all ears; he thought he heard distinct cries from the first floor,



"Hello, hello," said he to his secretary, "do you hear?"

"Yes, chief . . . there's no doubt, it's the child that's ill."

"No," corrected Chantecoq, "it is not a child's voice, but a woman's."

"The Nannie?"

"Very likely."

"Let's go up and see."

"Don't get flustered, leave it to me."

Chantecoq and Meteor went quickly up the staircase that led to the upper floor. The detective put his ear to the nursery door and he listened attentively to the half-stifled and fretful cries.

He looked through the keyhole!

"Oh! Oh!" he muttered. He had just seen, stretched on the bed in front of the door, the wretched Anne, gagged and bound so that she was unable to move or utter any sounds except moans and cries.

"Now you look," said Chantecoq to his secretary. Meteor obeyed, then he said:

"Now we know for certain that this poor woman is not an accomplice of our assailants."

Chantecoq shrugged his shoulders.

"All the same, one cannot leave her like that. . . . Go up to your room and dress yourself as Armandine. As soon as you've done so, come to my quarters. Hurry up if we are to get to bed to-night."

Meteor did not want telling twice.

As soon as he had gone, the detective tried to open the nursery door; but it was locked inside. He then went to M. and Mme. Lachesnay's room, listened, but heard nothing. He tried the handle of the door. It opened quite easily. The room was empty, as he expected. The Lachesnays had not got back.

Remembering that when being taken round by the mistress of the house in the afternoon, the dressing-

room communicated with the nursery, he said to himself:

"It is obvious that whoever has bound and gagged the nurse has come through here. . . . Which shows they know the topography of the place."

A smile of satisfaction spread over his face as he muttered:

"That's all right. Now I am satisfied. Anne is, perhaps, not too comfortable. So much the worse for her, but I bet a thousand to one she is not much the worse for it!"

He went into the passage and reached his room, where he shut himself in.

Twenty minutes later he had become the impeccable Augustin.

Someone knocked at his door. A soft voice called out:

"It is I, your niece!" Chantecoq opened the door.

It was Meteor who was once more an ideal cook.

"Now," said the king of detectives, "let's go and release Nannie."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You go downstairs, knock at Anne's door. She will, of course, only answer by cries and groans. Then you will shout like a maniac: 'Uncle, uncle! Help! Someone has murdered Nannie . . . !' Then I shall hurry to you when you call and we will force the door. Then I shall rush to the victim and you will continue to scream and cry out and only do what I tell you."

"When do I begin my serenade?"

"Right away—you ought to be down there now."

And down there Meteor was in less than a twinkling. And in a few seconds was beginning, as he called it, his serenade, according to the instructions he had just received. Needless to say he brilliantly executed exactly what Chantecoq had arranged.



Less than two minutes later, after several pushes with his shoulder, Chantecoq broke a hole in a panel of the nursery door, large enough to put his hand through and pull back the bolt that kept the door shut.

He made his way into the room. The baby, under the influence of the medicine that Doctor Le Bosser had prescribed, was sleeping soundly.

But Meteor's frantic performance was not yet over. He went up to Nannie, who looked at him beseechingly; and with tears in his voice he cried:

"Oh, my poor woman, what terrible ruffians have treated you like this?"

Anne did not reply, and for the very good reason that the false manservant was busy taking out her gag. The pseudo-Armandine who was too well schooled not to play her part to perfection, wailed:

"Oh, uncle, uncle, it is terrible . . . terrible . . .!"

Pretending to be annoyed by these lamentations, Chantecoq replied:

"Instead of waiting here, go to the kitchen and fetch some vinegar."

"Oh, no, uncle, I shouldn't dare go alone."

Anne, relieved of her gag, began to breathe freely, and whispered hoarsely:

"She must not go . . . this time, I am sure it is ghosts . . . it is ghosts . . .!"

Her head fell upon the pillow; undoubtedly she had fainted. Chantecoq with a turn of the hand undid the cords which, as he noticed with a smile, had not been too tightly fastened.

Then taking some water from a jug he began to sprinkle the nurse's forehead and cheeks.

As she persisted in not coming to, Chantecoq made a sign to Meteor to come close to him and he whispered in his ear.

With a twinkle in his eye Meteor disappeared and

came back two minutes later with a bottle that he gave to Chantecoq. It had a label on it with the words: "smelling salts."

The king of detectives uncorked it and held it under the nurse's nose. She gave a violent start and uttered a piercing cry. She sat up and sneezed her head off.

Meteor murmured:

"Good Lord, it will make her ill."

In a broken voice the Nannie called out:

"Monsieur Augustin! . . . Monsieur Augustin. Whatever is it that you have . . . given me to smell?"

Without moving a muscle Chantecoq replied:

"Those were some salts that Armandine found in madame's room."

The nurse replied:

"You could resuscitate a corpse with those. . . ."

"And we needed them," asserted Augustin solemnly, "because faints like the one you have just had are always extremely dangerous, above all for a woman who is nursing a baby."

"In that case, Monsieur Augustin, you have perhaps saved my life?"

"I can't say; but I have done everything to save you from an accident that might have proved fatal!"

"You are really very kind, Monsieur Augustin; if it had not been for you I don't know what would have become of me."

"Do you feel better?"

"My nose tingles a little, and my eyes too, but anyway, they are not too bad, and I thank you."

"In five minutes you won't feel anything."

"My goodness, what a to-do!" exclaimed the nurse. Then seized with sudden alarm, she asked:

"Is the little one in the cot?"

"Yes, yes, but don't worry," said Chantecoq, "the



ghosts have not taken that one. They have not thought him attractive enough for that."

"Have monsieur and madame come back?"

"Not yet."

"Then it is not very late?"

"Hardly twenty-three o'clock."

"Twenty-three o'clock?"

"Yes, oh, yes! that's right," replied Chantecoq, "I forgot you don't like this new system. Twenty-three o'clock, is eleven o'clock in the evening. . . ."

"Then," ejaculated Anne, "did they come sooner than usual . . . ?"

"Who came?" asked the sleuth-hound.

"Why, the ghosts. . . ."

"Ah!" remarked Chantecoq, giving a knowing wink at Armandine, "you are sure they are ghosts?"

"What else do you think they could be?" replied the nurse.

"You have seen them?"

"Yes, I've seen them. . . ."

"How many were there?"

"I did not count them, but there were at least a good half-dozen."

"What were their faces like?"

"They had no faces, they were wrapped in white sheets that they waved about with their arms. You could not see their arms but they were longer than a long-handled feather brush. . . . You know, Augustin, those brushes you use for cobwebs. . . ."

"I don't know if they had arms," said the "tec," "but they most certainly had hands since they tied you up!"

"Ah, I don't know anything, my poor Augustin; immediately I saw them surround me and dance around me like cats on hot bricks, I began to faint . . . and from that moment I neither saw nor heard anything that happened. So that's all I can tell you.

"But I've got a terrible thirst . . . and you would be very kind if you would bring me a glass of water. . . ."

"Armandine," said Augustin.

"Yes, uncle," replied the secretary instantly.

"Well . . . don't you understand?"

"What?"

"Why, that poor Anne here is dying of thirst. . . ."

"I will go and fetch her a glass of wine."

"Yes, my goodness, I think that would be better than water. I feel a bit shaky and I want something to buck me up."

The false Armandine, who appeared to have entirely overcome her fright, left the room.

"Ah, my good Augustin," said the Nannie, "let me thank you once again. Really, I don't know whether I shall stop in the house, because it is certainly haunted, and my word, a haunted house is no joking matter!"

"But," put in the detective, with an assumed ingenuous manner, "you said you had chased away the evil spirits with holy water. You said you had a bottle full and that you were going to use it on the staircase."

"I did so before going to bed," replied the Nannie, who seemed to have an answer for everything, "only, as it turned out, it was not holy water. Mother Leport's daughter, instead of going to Quiberon church to fetch it, simply went and drew it from the fountain!"

"That must be it," said the sleuth-hound, apparently quite convinced. Armandine, at this moment, returned with a bottle of wine and a glass.

Chantecoq filled the glass, and as he handed it to the Nannie he said:

"Take that! At this moment it will do you more good than water, even holy water."



Anne did not need telling twice. . . . In two or three gulps she emptied the glass.

"Have another?" the detective suggested, with all the seriousness in the world.

"No, that's enough! Thank you," said the Nannie refusing; "it does not do to abuse good things."

"Now," advised the false Augustin, "you go to sleep quietly . . . my niece and I, before going to bed, will wait up for our master and mistress to return."

"Be careful not to say anything in front of madame," advised the nurse. And then, looking nervously towards the forced door, she added:

"How are you going to explain all that damage?"

Chantecoq replied:

"It will only take ten minutes to put that all right! Armandine, remain with Anne whilst I go and get the necessary tools."

He came back in a few minutes with a hammer, some small nails, a pot of strong glue and a brush that he had found in the tool shed near the carpenter's shop.

Whilst he got on with the job, Anne remarked:

"You would have done better to have come in through monsieur and madame's room and the dressing-room."

The king of detectives with imperturbable coolness replied:

"I tried, but it was impossible."

"But why?"

"The door of monsieur and madame's room was locked."

Whilst the detective gave her a sidelong glance, Anne replied:

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite."

"That surprises me, because monsieur and madame never lock their door when they go out."

"This evening they made an exception," declared Chantecoq.

The nurse, who seemed to be a little upset by the discussion, in spite of the triviality of the affair, continued:

"It is very strange."

Chantecoq, as he continued to mend the panel, answered carelessly:

"No doubt you had also shut the door between your room and the dressing-room."

Anne appeared a little nonplussed by this remark . . . she hesitated to answer.

After reflecting some seconds she decided to say:

"Really, I quite forget."

"It is very easy to find out," said Meteor as he went towards the door, "the keyhole is empty and the bolt has not been pushed."

Anne, growing uneasy, tried to explain:

"I remember now; madame told me, before going out, not to lock that door, so that when she came back she could come and kiss the little one that she thinks is Jackie."

"Ay, quite so," remarked Chantecoq; "that explains it . . . but really, I don't know why I asked you. . . . I was mixing myself up with things that don't concern me."

"Oh, don't say that, my good Augustin," protested the nurse.

The noise of the voices and the detective's hammering, though light, on the panel of the door, roused the child, who began to cry.

"Will you give him to me?" Anne asked the false Armandine. "I don't feel well enough to get up."

Meteor replied:

"Don't you bother, I'll attend to him."



"If he is hungry," observed the nurse, "you will not be able to feed him."

"That's true," answered Meteor, stifling a burst of laughter, "that would be very difficult . . . you see I'm an old woman."

"Don't say that," exclaimed Anne; "you are, on the contrary, quite young. One can see that, not only by your face, but by your movements . . . and if you wanted to marry, you could very soon do so."

"Oh, marriage; not me, that's not in my line," said Meteor, with a tone of indifference. . . .

"It has its good and its bad side," philosophised the nurse, "but there's no need to be contemptuous about it. I'm sure you would be an excellent housewife and a very good mother, and make a man very happy."

Meteor could only puff out his cheeks and explode. He sat down by the child, who was screaming at the top of his voice—showing that he was certainly stronger—and began to rock the cradle, singing in a falsetto voice:

"Go to sleep my little piccaninny  
Prairie fox will catch you if you don't."

The child became quiet . . . Chantecoq had finished his job:

"Now," said he, "that is all in order, we'd better say 'good night.'"

"Very well, good Augustin."

"Sleep well."

"And you also, Armandine."

"You don't need us?"

"No, thank you."

The detective and his assistant withdrew. Once on the landing, Chantecoq said to Meteor:

"Let us go down to the kitchen. I fancy we are on the eve of some interesting discoveries."

They reached the basement.

When they got to the kitchen the sleuth-hound said to his assistant:

"Make some coffee. . . . It won't do us any harm . . . on the contrary."

"Chief," said Meteor, "I'll take great trouble with it."

Whilst he was busy making a good cup of moka, Chantecoq switched on the lights and began his investigations.

As he made a thorough examination, leaving no spot or corner unexplored, the king of detectives reasoned as follows:

"Now, I am convinced that this Anne is in league with Jackie's abductors, and the events that have just taken place will link together and explain everything quite logically.

"Exactly as I guessed, our assailants, discovering the disappearance of that ring, have resorted to every possible means to recover it.

"Having learned also, undoubtedly through Anne (who had heard some directions given by her master that I was at Ker-Yvette under a disguise to make inquiries about the abduction of little Jackie), they resolved to kill two birds with one stone—that is to say: in searching for the ring to get rid of Meteor and me at the same time.

"Whilst we were dining or dressing ourselves up, the Havre woman let into the house one, two, or three, no matter how many, of our assailants. She hid them somewhere, probably in the hanging cupboard at the far end of the dressing-room.

"Before coming out they waited until we had gone down into the basement . . . instead of assaulting us in cold blood, which would obviously have been as



dangerous for them as for us, they waited until we were down in the subterranean tunnel. Satisfied that their accomplices—who were busy searching for the ring in the passage which they had entered at low tide by a hole from the *Cave of the Winds*—would probably finish us off, they blocked our exit by putting the sheet-iron over the hole which they found in the coal-cellar.

“Evidently it was quite well thought out; but they had forgotten that I have acquired, in the course of my long career, a certain amount of experience in this kind of trickery, so that I needed to be taken into account. . . . Now what can we deduce from all this . . . ?

“Oh, it is very simple!

“First: As I had foreseen, Anne is an accomplice of the abductors.

“Secondly: They—I do not refer to the two who are bathing in the *Cave of the Winds*, undoubtedly for ever; but to the others who, an hour ago, tried to cut off retreat—to allay any suspicions that we might have had against this Havre nurse have gagged and bound her in a very half-hearted sort of way.

“That’s satisfactory so far—but there is something better—yes, much better.

“The riddle is being solved, the mystery is being cleared up. This afternoon, in the course of her confidences, Anne told me a story which, more than ever, ought to engage my attention . . . about the American family, the Colmadges . . . in whose service she was. The daughter had married the brother of Wilbright, the Lachesnaye’s neighbour and close friend.

“Let us follow it up:

“Miss Colmadge is in love with a cinema actor. . . . Owing to her father’s wish, she is compelled to marry

the Wilbright in question. He makes her very unhappy . . . but nevertheless, they have a child.

"The young wife dies . . . leaving a baby who, to-day, is six months old: that is to say, the age of little Jackie.

"Legally, the baby will inherit the Colmadge fortune which is pretty certain to be considerable. Suppose this baby fell seriously ill and was pronounced a hopeless case by the doctors and only given a short time to live, like the little one who is now sleeping upstairs . . . papa, being at the end of his resources, and expecting to live for the present and future upon the bounty of his parents-in-law, might very easily say to himself:

"If my son dies, I am cut off. . . . Not that!"

"Then why should he not have thought of substituting for his poor little rickety baby a healthy child like little Jackie?

"Another point—this Wilbright has a brother who is a neighbour, friend, and frequent visitor of the Lachesnayes, to whom they have given their confidence.

"Ah, by Jove! that ghost story that he told. . . . That detailed account which most likely exists only in his imagination, is a yarn he invented to cloak the events which have happened during the last forty-eight hours at Ker-Yvette, and to strike terror into the servants, except Anne, and to force them to leave.

"That explains everything, including the secret passage, which has been discovered by Wilbright . . . all, all!

"One has only to discover who is the owner of the ring I found this evening . . . I shall know that by noon to-morrow.

"So it is no good worrying with researches which will lead me no further. . . ."



On returning to the kitchen, he remarked to his secretary, who was busy filtering the coffee:

"My boy, I've good news."

Meteor puffed out his cheeks.

"You know," continued the king of detectives, "I never bluff."

"I know that."

"Well, my dear fellow," added the sleuth-hound. "I think I can say that the day after to-morrow you will be able to go shrimping again."

## CHAPTER XI

### IN WHICH CHANTECOQ SHOWS US THAT HIS BOX OF TRICKS IS BY NO MEANS EMPTY

HARDLY had the king of detectives and his secretary drunk their coffee, when the noise of footsteps on the landing above attracted their attention.

The detective said instantly:

"The Lachesnayes have got back. You had better wait a minute or two and then go to bed quietly, because I fancy that to-morrow will be rather a busy day and we shall need to be in good form."

Thereupon, Chantecoq mounted the stairs and reached the hall just as the young artist and his wife were going to their room.

"Do monsieur and madame need anything?" asked the false manservant.

"No, thanks," replied Yvette graciously, appearing to be very pleased with her evening at Wilbright's house.

And then she added immediately, with a shadow of nervousness:

"Baby is not ill?"

"Oh, no, madame . . . far from it," replied the detective with wonderful assurance; "he seems much better and is sleeping soundly."

"Nannie had her dinner all right?"

"She seemed quite satisfied."

"That's good. Good night, Augustin. You need not wait up."



"Oh, madame, it is not very late."

"My husband and I do not usually stay out so late," said Mme. Lachesnaye cheerily.

Before following, Lachesnaye gave an inquiring look at the detective.

While Yvette went upstairs, Chantecoq whispered to the artist:

"Try and make an excuse to come and join me as soon as you can in the studio."

Lachesnaye nodded assent and rejoined his wife just as she went into her room.

"I want to kiss baby," she said.

"No, dear, don't do that."

"Why?"

"You would risk waking him, and Augustin says that he is better."

"You are right."

They undressed.

When Jean was in his pyjamas he exclaimed:

"You don't mind if I read a little?"

"Not at all," replied the young wife, "especially as I want to do the same . . . I'm not a bit sleepy."

"The fact is that Wilbright made us drink a little too much champagne."

"At one time my head began to go round. Fortunately, he suggested a walk on the cliffs; if he hadn't, I believe I should have had to hold your arm to get back."

"Very well, I'll go down and fetch some books from the studio."

"Try and find me something interesting."

"A love story?"

"No, an historical novel . . . one of Madame Campan's, Marie-Antoinette's first lady-in-waiting."

"All right, but I am not quite sure where they are," said Jean as he went off, so as to conceal his impatience to hear the important information that Chantecoq

had to give him. He found the detective in the studio.

With his usual directness he began:

"First of all, let me say, monsieur, that everything is going splendidly; much better and much more rapidly than I expected. I cannot tell you anything yet; first, because it would be extremely long and your absence would disturb Mme. Lachesnaye; and secondly, because I do not like to count my chickens before they are hatched. True, the chickens are pecking through their shells. . . . But I will simply ask you one question."

"Do so, by all means."

"How did you hear of your nurse? Was it by personal recommendation or through a servants' agency?"

The question seemed to take the young artist by surprise.

"But surely you don't suspect Anne?"

The king of detectives cut in:

"Please don't ask me any questions. I can't answer you: it is against my rule."

Chantecoq spoke pleasantly, but with such an air of determination that Lachesnaye thought it unwise to insist, so he replied at once:

"Anne was recommended by our friend Wilbright."

"Good, thank you, my dear monsieur. Now I can sleep till to-morrow and I can only repeat what I have just said: everything goes splendidly."

Lachesnaye, dominated by the mastery that the king of detectives always exercised over those with whom he came in contact, held out his hand, saying:

"I will only say one thing, Monsieur Chantecoq: it is that my confidence in you is so great that for the first time in forty-eight hours I expect to sleep peacefully."

Chantecoq left the studio first; the young artist



took from the bookcase a couple of the books that his wife had asked for, and returned to his room.

The night passed without incident.

The next morning, as they had told their manservant overnight, M. and Mme. Lachesnaye found their breakfast ready in the studio at the proper time. Yvette noticed that when waiting on them Augustin seemed depressed and worried.

When he left the room she said to her husband:

"Did you notice how serious Augustin seemed. Perhaps he does not like the place."

"I should not be surprised. Anyway, I'll ask him."

When Chantecoq reappeared, Lachesnaye asked him, playing his rôle, keeping back from his wife the truth, which would perhaps have given her a serious shock:

"Tell me, my man, you seem unhappy."

"Yes, monsieur," replied the detective.

"Why, what is the matter?" inquired Yvette, "last night you seemed very happy, but to-day, judging from your face, you are dissatisfied."

"Oh, not in the least, madame," protested the detective, "on the contrary, I was saying just now to my niece, how lucky we were when Doctor Le Bosser recommended us to come here."

"Then I don't understand," put in the artist.

"Neither do I," added the young wife.

Chantecoq replied:

"I did not want to tell you, monsieur and madame, because I have only just come. I do not want you to be bothered, but I have just had a telegram saying that my sister at Nantes is seriously ill and that they give up hope of her."

"Poor fellow," murmured Yvette.

Lachesnaye, guessing the detective's intention, added:

"This sister is Armandine's mother?"

"Yes, monsieur; but I have not dared to tell her the bad news, for the poor girl would be so upset, especially if she is unable to see her mother and kiss her before she passes away."

Chantecoq spoke these last words in a quavering voice which affected Yvette, whose warm heart was easily moved by another's troubles. So she said:

"You must both go at once. . . . In cases like this there must be no delay."

"Oh, madame, you are really too kind," exclaimed Chantecoq, "but I don't want to leave monsieur and madame in a fix, above all, the day after we arrive."

"Madame is right," Lachesnaye cut in, "there is a train that leaves Quiberon, I think, about one o'clock, you can easily catch it and get to Auray where you can take the express to Nantes."

Augustin was overwhelmed:

"I do not know how to thank monsieur and madame for their kindness. If monsieur and madame are agreeable, as soon as we can we will come back. But in the meanwhile I am very anxious because I don't know how monsieur and madame will get on whilst we are away."

"Don't worry, my man," said Yvette, "we shall get on all right. Now go and tell your niece, as gently as possible, the sad news, and say how sorry we are."

Lachesnaye added:

"I have to go to Quiberon in an hour's time. You and Armandine had better get ready and I will take you with me."

"Monsieur is indeed very kind."

"I don't think you could find anyone here to take you. A fine day like this Jean-Marie will be fishing."

Chantecoq replied:

"Thank you, monsieur; that will save Armandine and myself a long walk in the sun. We will have a



hurried snack and then we shall not miss the train."

Chantecoq was delighted that he had been so well understood and helped by Lachesnaye. The truth was that he was anxious to get away from Ker-Yvette as quickly as possible in order to carry out some plans that he felt sure would lead to final success.

An hour later he came into the studio followed by Armandine who had been using onions to produce tears.

Mme. Lachesnaye, who was waiting for them, offered words of consolation until her husband appeared in outdoor dress and said to the pseudo-domestics who were carrying the suitcase which they had brought with them the evening before:

"Let us start."

Chantecoq had never been better pleased, as this distortion of the truth was not only essential to the success of the business but especially to the peace of mind of the poor mother.

Acting his rôle to the very end, he thought he ought to add:

"My niece and I have left our things upstairs in a trunk ready for when we come back. Madame may rest assured that all is in order."

"I am sure, Augustin."

"Then good-bye, madame."

Meteor-Armandine stifled his sobs and mumbled a few unintelligent words, and was escorted on her uncle's arm into the car, where she sank with an appearance of despair that nothing could appease.

Lachesnaye, who drove very well, took the wheel.

On the way, Chantecoq said to the artist:

"You have acted splendidly and have helped things along admirably."

"Where shall I take you?" asked Lachesnaye.

"To Quiberon where I want to ring up Paris; after that will you drop me two or three hundred yards from the village of Kerhostin? You can then go home and await events with confidence for you will soon hear from me."

Lachesnaye, who could not fail to share the optimism of the great detective, replied:

"It is indeed a great piece of luck for me that you happened to be holiday-making in this beautiful country and that my friend Le Bosser should be your friend."

"And it is a great pleasure to me, I assure you, to render you a service which your wife and yourself so fully deserve."

Travelling steadily, the car soon reached Quiberon and pulled up at the post office, which was at the entrance to the town.

"I am afraid I shall keep you some little time as I have to get a call through to Paris."

"In the meantime, if you have errands to do, please do them. This call is extremely important and ought, I think, to settle a question I have in my mind, and I shall be very pleased if in a little time I can tell you that my theory is correct."

"Very well, M. Chantecoq, I will go and do my shopping and afterwards I will come back here."

Chantecoq entered the post office with Meteor. He went to the counter and asked for a number in Paris. This morning, the line was fairly free. He got through in less than half an hour.

It was to Logeron, the jeweller, that he 'phoned. He wanted to ask him to whom the ring belonged that he had found the night before in the subterranean passage.

M. Logeron, who, on hearing Chantecoq's name came at once to the instrument, said without hesitation that the ring had been bought at his establish-



ment eighteen months before by an American lady named Miss Colmadge who meant to give it to her fiancé, M. Douglas Wilbright. Chantecoq, delighted, thanked his friend very warmly and came triumphantly to Meteor to whom he said:

"Victory! I was not mistaken. . . . Now we can begin to laugh."

Lachesnaye came a few minutes later. Chantecoq and Meteor got into the car and the detective confided to the artist:

"The telephone call that I have just had to Paris settles it; to-morrow, to-day perhaps, we shall know what has become of little Jackie, and whatever has happened, I promise you absolutely that he has come to no harm.

"And now I ask you to take my secretary and myself as far as the cross-roads of St. Pierre and Kerhostin, because I am about to make some detailed inquiries."

Lachesnaye did immediately what the detective desired. A few minutes later he pulled up his car at the spot indicated. After shaking him warmly by the hand, the detective and his secretary got out of the car and went by a side road to their house where Gautrais and Marie-Jeanne did not expect them so soon.

It is hardly necessary to say that following the detective's instructions, the dummy which represented him was lying in his bed and that Gautrais had placed it in such a way that it had been seen by two or three country folk.

Immediately Chantecoq said:

"Go at once and tell Marie-Jeanne to get us a good lunch and serve it, not in the dining-room, but in Meteor's room. After that, go immediately to Kerné. Take Meteor's motor-bike, call at Wilbright's, the American; tell the servant, who will come to the

door, that your chief, Chantecoq, is very ill and that you are looking for Doctor Le Bosser. You have heard that he is at Monsieur Wilbright's and you want him to come here as soon as possible. If by good luck the Doctor is there, which is quite possible, let him come quietly on his push-bike, but tell him that I invite him to lunch and I have a good deal to say to him."

"Very good, monsieur," said Gautrais. And he went off to carry out his master's orders.

Chantecoq continued:

"You, Meteor, go and take off your make-up and be sure to let the district know that you have got back from your trip this morning and that you have found me very ill and you are very worried, as I have a high fever."

"Very good, chief."

"And one word more; haven't you in our wardrobe the parson's rig-out that you brought?"

"Yes, chief, the one that goes with the long, grey beard, and the wig with the bald head."

"That's right. Go and get it ready as soon as you can."

"It will be ready in a quarter of an hour, chief."

"I shan't want it for an hour, so you have plenty of time to change your wig and your clothes. I'll go and change and get ready for this afternoon's work."

He went into his study and came out a few minutes later in pyjamas; he was Chantecoq once more in the flesh.

Stretching himself on a lounge wicker chair he filled his pipe, and having lit it, he murmured through the puffs of smoke:

"Now let me shut myself up in my study."

Half-closing his eyes he began to ponder, and every now and then blurted out these remarks:



"Evidently he should know everything, but how can one make him speak? That is not very easy. However, I should gain time; well, it has happened before and it will happen again. . . . Anyhow, things are going well. Yes . . . but . . ." He rang the bell. Then he became pensive again, this time in silence. Sitting up suddenly, just as his pipe went out, he exclaimed:

"This time, I've got it; no need to hesitate with rogues like these. Ah! Let me smoke another pipe. Certainly there is nothing to get excited about."

He finished his second pipe and went back into his bedroom when Meteor appeared carrying on his arm a cassock and a priest's hat and holding in one hand a pair of heavy shoes, and a large cardboard box in the other.

He put them down on one of the chairs and inquired:

"Can I go and take a turn in the village now?"

"Yes, and be sure to appear to be very distressed."

"Shall I use the onions again?"

"No, don't overdo it."

"Sorry, chief."

"And try and find out why the custom-house men did not turn up the other night at Ker-Yvette."

"Yes, sir."

He went off.

During this time, Gautrais had ridden off on the secretary's motor-bike. Ten minutes later he had arrived at the American's villa. He rang the bell. The manservant, Harold, opened the door. Immediately Gautrais, who had leant the machine up against the wall, politely raised his cap and said:

"I am Chantecoq's manservant and I've come to inquire if Doctor Le Bosser is here."

"Why?" asked Harold.

"I'll tell you," replied Gautrais, whose face showed great distress.

And immediately he added:

"My master has been seized with a terrible fever this morning. He has a violent pain in his side and he has an awful headache. He is coughing. He looks frightfully ill. At Quiberon I was told that Doctor Le Bosser was calling this morning on M. Wilbright. So I came, as the case is very urgent and something must be done at once. Excuse me troubling you."

"Why, sure," replied Harold with a marked American accent.

And he added affably:

"At Quiberon you were rightly informed. Doctor Le Bosser has been here to see M. Wilbright; but he left about a quarter of an hour ago."

Gautrais made a gesture of despair.

Harold replied:

"Don't worry. He can't be very far off. I expect you will find him at mother Leport's, whose daughter had an accident yesterday. It seems she has sprained her ankle."

"Would you mind telling me where Mme. Leport's house is?"

"You can see it from here," said Harold, pointing out a little cottage in a potato field.

Gautrais followed his directions and was there in no time.

Doctor Le Bosser was, as a matter of fact, busy binding the young Breton girl's ankle, who was asking:

"Do you think I shall soon get back to work, Doctor?"

Le Bosser replied:

"It will be a fortnight at least."

The poor girl sighed pathetically, saying:



"A fortnight out of work. . . . I shall commit suicide and end everything. . . ."

"That," replied the Doctor, "would be too drastic."

And turning to the old woman who began to invoke all the saints in Brittany, he said:

"Come, come, don't make such a fuss."

Mme. Leport burst into tears:

"I shall never be able to pay your bill, Doctor. We owe the baker twenty-five francs."

"Here is the money for the baker," said the Doctor, "and don't spend it on drink or I shall refuse to attend you."

As he went, Doctor Le Bosser was bowed out with the thanks and blessings of the daughter and the mother.

Outside he met Gautrais, who awaited his coming with great impatience.

Chantecoq's servant at once said to the Doctor:

"Monsieur Chantecoq has got back to his villa and wants to see you. He wishes me to ask you to have lunch with him. He has a great deal to tell you."

The Doctor replied:

"I have one or two more visits to pay, but go back at once. I will be with him at half-past twelve."

"Thank you, Doctor Le Bosser, just one word if you please."

"Yes, my man."

"If anyone asks news of M. Chantecoq please say that I came to find you because my master has caught a fresh chill and is seriously ill."

"Very well."

Le Bosser jumped on his push-bike, and Gautrais mounted his motor-bike and returned to his master who congratulated him on his speed and the way he had carried out his instructions. Then he asked:

"You did not see M. Wilbright?"

"No, master."

"The servant, how did he take it?"

"At first he seemed a little flummoxed . . . excuse the word."

"I understand."

"But in my opinion he wants watching because one would never suspect him."

"A big man?"

"Yes, but not as tall as you, Monsieur Chantecoq."

"Now go at once and tell Marie-Jeanne that as Doctor Le Bosser is coming we want a nice lunch. So as not to waste time I'll go and dress in my parson's rig-out in which I am going to carry out the last phase of my inquiry."

Just as he had predicted, as mid-day struck, Doctor Le Bosser arrived at Chantecoq's villa. Meteor, who was waiting for him, took him at once to the room upstairs where lunch had been laid, so that people could not see from the outside what was going on. At the sight of the old missionary who, seated in an arm-chair smoked an enormous pipe and sipped a glass of fine old port, the good Doctor, although he knew it was the king of detectives, could not restrain an exclamation of surprise that his friend had been able to impersonate to the life this new character that he had chosen for reasons best known to himself, and which were, in consequence, bound to be adequate.

Chantecoq welcomed him at once with his usual heartiness and poured out a glass of port for the good Doctor, which the latter, in spite of the fact that he forbade it to his patients, did not hesitate to drink. Then, sitting down to the table, enjoying Marie-Jeanne's cooking, which was evidently better than that of the ephemeral Armandine, Chantecoq related to Doctor Le Bosser, who was absolutely astounded, everything that had occurred the night before at villa Ker-Yvette.



When he had finished, the great detective said, with legitimate satisfaction:

"Well, my dear fellow, I think that it is pretty good work."

"It is simply amazing," agreed Le Bosser.

"And what conclusion do you come to?" inquired the detective with a quizzical smile.

"The whole affair is quite simple; this Wilbright, Lachesnaye's neighbour, has been his brother's agent in the abduction of little Jackie."

"That indeed is obvious," agreed Chantecoq, "it only remains for me to tell the rogue that I know the truth, and make him tell me where the little fellow is hidden."

"To you, that is child's play," remarked the Doctor.

"Ho, ho . . .!" exclaimed the king of detectives shaking his head, "it will not be so easy as all that. Anyway, this Wilbright is evidently a dangerous rascal, and also very shrewd, and he will certainly not allow himself to be drawn into the net so easily as you seem to think."

"Also, without pressing you—as he is your patient—to divulge professional secrets, I should, all the same, be very grateful if you could give me some information as to his habits, his relations, what you know about his past, etc. . . . etc. . . . in fact, anything that you think might assist me."

"My dear friend," replied Le Bosser, "you know how anxious I am to do anything I can."

"Yes, I know it, and you have proved it."

"Well, I'm afraid in this case I cannot be of much help. Wilbright's habits? They are those of a bachelor who lives alone with his servants; he is an artist—more amateur than professional. He is not so enthusiastic as young Lachesnaye; for example: I think he is fond of whisky and liqueurs, because when I go to his house, I almost always find him having a

glass, and if you do not want to offend him, you must do the same."

"That is interesting," remarked Chantecoq.

"As to his relatives," continued the Doctor, "I know very little about them. I know that last winter, at Christmas, he had a number of people from Paris for the festivities."

"Ah, yes," said Chantecoq, "the ghost business."

"But I may tell you that his guests left the district next day and no one here had a chance of having a word with them."

"As to what happened, I only know what Lachesnaye has told me and what he has told you himself. I must say I did not know he had a brother, and I think that Lachesnaye does not know either."

Chantecoq replied:

"No need, my dear Doctor, to worry your head further. Now, I am satisfied. Since Wilbright drinks, all is well. However, there is one more question I should like to ask."

"Carry on!"

"I am not worrying you?"

"Not in the least."

"Wilbright has in his service a valet and a cook?"

"That is so."

"Can you tell me anything about them?"

"Why, yes. Harold is an American. I have heard Wilbright often say that he had been with him for years and that he is an excellent servant."

"As for the cook, she is from the country, a sailor's widow, a very good sort, who is incapable of doing a dirty trick."

"Was she there on Christmas Eve?"

"No, she only came last June, on my recommendation."

"Has she told you what she thinks of her master?"

"Yes, she said if she did not need money she would



not stay in his house: first, because he drinks; and also because he never speaks a word to her, giving his orders through his valet."

Chantecoq thought for a moment and then replied: "Does the cook sleep in?"

"No, she goes every night at six o'clock to her old mother, who lives in a little hut at Kerné."

"Good," remarked the king of detectives with a satisfied air. "Now I know my ground. My dear Doctor, you have given me some very useful information."

During the rest of the lunch no further reference was made to the mystery that Chantecoq was trying to elucidate.

The Doctor went off about half-past one, begging to be excused because he had to attend a case at Quiberon.

Chantecoq went back to his room and took from a drawer a pistol like the one he used in the *Cave of the Winds*, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he found a long stick, and unscrewing the knob, he looked down the pipe inside. A little later he set off quietly, walking across the fields, after having given his secretary some mysterious instructions.

## CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH WILBRIGHT IS ON HIS GUARD, AND  
SO IS CHANTECOQ

JAMES WILBRIGHT, lolling on a sofa in his studio, was smoking a cigar, his eyes half-closed as if his mind was far away. Well, the American was not, at this moment, thinking of the view that this interesting and picturesque part of the country offered, for a moment later he frowned, pursed his lips, threw away his cigar, half-smoked, through the open window into the garden and uttered a coarse oath that there is no need to repeat; but it showed he was in a bad humour.

Then going up to his writing-table he rang the electric bell. Immediately, a hanging which hid a door was drawn back, and Harold appeared.

Wilbright spoke in a hard, dry voice:

"I have thought over what you told me just now. There is now no doubt that Chantecoq's valet came to find out what he could and all this story has been invented to put my fears at rest.

"I should not be at all astonished if either to-day or to-morrow the detective whom you have just recognized under his disguise of Augustin, the manservant, does not present himself in one of those disguises of which he is a past-master. Well, you are conversant with the whole story and you have shown such devotion since you have been in my service that I continue to give you my confidence about my pro-



jects, but also I rely upon you to carry out my wishes.

"The situation is perfectly clear and can be summed up as follows: Chantecoq, I daresay, knows a great many things. . . . He may have got it into his head that there is an understanding between my brother and myself, and that, in consequence, I must know what has become of the child. . . .

"He will first try and make me speak . . . I shall tell him nothing, of course, but my refusal will not stop him from continuing his inquiry. . . .

"Unfortunately—for he is very clever and well-informed and thoroughly equipped—he will attain his end. . . . Douglas's fraud will be brought to light and the Colmadge's fortune will escape him for ever, not to mention the law proceedings of which he will be the object as well as myself—his accomplice."

Harold understood.

"I can't imagine why a quiet man like you has been led into an affair of this sort."

The American shrugged his shoulders.

Continuing in a familiar strain that was permitted to him by his master, the valet added:

"Especially as you are not on very good terms with your brother."

Wilbright explained:

"Since the death of his wife we became more friendly. . . . And then, necessity knows no law . . . I had some bad losses on the Stock Exchange and I found myself in a very unpleasant position."

"I've no doubt."

"It was necessary to get out of it by hook or by crook . . . the sale of my pictures was not enough to make up the loss and allow me to lead the independent life I like. . . . So I agreed to lend my brother—lend is only a manner of speaking—let us say, rather, to sell my brother my help.

"And as you know, all went well. . . . The Lachesnayes never suspected anything and I am convinced the police never thought of suspecting me.

"But this cursed Chantecoq must go and mix himself up in this business . . . and now he's got us. . . ."

"Maybe," said Harold; "but he has not got the child."

"If we refuse to give him up he will certainly inform against us. . . . Douglas and I will be arrested . . . and you also, without a doubt. It's a cheerful outlook. . . ."

"It is certainly not very pleasant."

"To get away," replied Wilbright, "it is necessary to have money, much money, and Chantecoq is so quick that he will trace us in no time. . . . However, we must get away."

"Yes, we must go," replied the manservant . . .  
"I don't want to make the acquaintance of the prisons in France."

"France," remarked the American, "has much more consideration for her criminals than we have in America."

"Perhaps so," agreed Harold, "but nothing compensates for liberty."

"I certainly don't wish to lose mine."

"There must be some way out," insinuated Harold.

"Which?"

"Can't we say to Chantecoq when he comes: 'If you agree not to take action against me or my manservant I can tell you how you can get back little Lachesnaye?'"

"You think Chantecoq would accept such an offer?"

"Why not?"

"Suppose he did not keep his word? Suppose he had us arrested?"



Harold thought for an instant. Then, as a devilish look came into his eyes, he replied:

"There is one way . . . which would at any rate get us out of the district and would also provide us with a sum of money, not perhaps a great amount, but enough to give us time to turn round."

"Well, what is it?" asked the American, very curious to know what his servant had thought of.

Harold replied:

"You'll agree, if it comes off, that I shall have my share?"

"How much?"

"Half."

"Very well," agreed Wilbright.

As he felt trapped, and in order to get away from Chantecoq, he was ready to make any sacrifice.

"Well, this is it," said Harold. Going close up to his master, he whispered, as if he were afraid that what he was about to say might be overheard by indiscreet ears.

As he explained his project, Wilbright's face changed and he gradually assumed a satisfied expression. When Harold finished, the American said simply:

"All right! Telephone right now to Lachesnaye and tell him I am waiting for him here as I have a very urgent message."

The manservant went to the 'phone which was in the hall. Wilbright, who now seemed to be quite at his ease, muttered between his teeth:

"There is no doubt about it, Harold is a valuable servant and he can demand what terms he likes."

Five minutes later Harold returned saying:

"M. Lachesnaye will be here in a quarter of an hour."

"Good."

Someone rang at the front door-bell.

"Hallo," said the American, "who is it calling on me at this time?"

"Perhaps it is Chantecoq," suggested the manservant.

"Go and see."

"And if it is?"

"Say I'm out."

"I shouldn't if I were you," said the manservant.

"Why?"

"It will look as if you were afraid, and that would bring matters to a head. The great thing is to gain time to put yourself right with Lachesnaye."

"Yes, you're right. . . . Go and open the door," ordered James. "Before you bring the visitor in, come and tell me what you think of him."

"Very well."

Two minutes later Harold came back to his master. He was carrying a tray with a letter on it.

As he handed it to the American, he said in a low tone:

"It isn't Chantecoq."

"You're sure?"

"Quite. It is a missionary, the Reverend Properec of the Order of the African Cross. He seems to be a very nice man."

"You are quite sure it is not Chantecoq disguised as a missionary?"

Without the slightest hesitation Harold replied:

"However clever this detective may be at disguising himself, he could not change himself like that."

Whilst listening to the manservant, Wilbright glanced over the letter that he had just given him.

It ran as follows:

MONSIEUR,

Although I have not the honour of your acquaintance I take the liberty of writing to you.



I am making a short stay in France at the house of a friend of mine, M. the Abbé Le Cornec, Archdeacon in the Diocese of Vannes, who has told me, that last Christmas time your villa was visited by ghosts.

Being very interested in these phenomena, and following out the conditions prescribed by our Holy Mother the Church, and conforming to the instructions of our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, I thought, perhaps, I might gather some details worthy of attention.

May I also say that I am the author of a book entitled "Some Natural Phenomena in Africa," of which you may have heard.

Under these circumstances I hope you will grant me an interview. Rest assured I do not wish to encroach upon your kindness.

Please accept, dear sir, the assurance of my sincere respects.

R. P. PROPEREC.

This polite and formal note had the effect of allaying the American's suspicion.

So he told his servant to show in the visitor at once. There was nothing surprising in this, although being on his guard, Harold had assured his master that it was out of the question that Chantecoq could be disguised in the cassock of the missionary. No two persons could present a greater difference in appearance than the detective, and the person who presented himself at that moment.

For Chantecoq was slim, upright, muscular and a regular sportsman who had known, in spite of his years, how to keep himself fit and in training; whilst this old priest, with a profile as sharp as a hatchet, a tanned complexion, wrinkled and parchment-like, with a frizzy grey beard and lumbering heavy gait,

represented a real type of a pioneer in a cassock, battered by rough weather and privations of all sorts.

As he entered the American's studio, he took off his hat and showed his wrinkled forehead as though it had been trepanned, which gave his face an appearance that called forth respect and sympathy.

Entirely reassured, Wilbright met him saying:

"Monsieur missionary, you are welcome."

Chantecoq replied in a strident hoarse voice:

"I thank you for your kindly greeting and I beg you to forgive me. I trust my curiosity does not seem very indiscreet?"

"Not at all," replied the American. "I am happy to give you what information I can."

Noticing the dust on his large shoes, he added:

"You came on foot?"

"Yes."

"From Quiberon?"

"From Quiberon."

"You must be very tired?"

"Not very. . . . I am used to very long walks in the woods and sunshine in Brittany, and when the sun is very hot here it is but a caress when compared with the African sun."

"Sit down, monsieur missionary," begged the master of the house, offering his guest an arm-chair near a little table upon which were a number of bottles of liqueurs with very large liqueur glasses.

The king of detectives sat down with slow and stiff movements, like an old man whose joints worked only with difficulty.

"Now," said Wilbright genially, "question me and I will try and answer you." But noticing that father Properec's eyes had fallen upon the labels of the bottles, so varied and so attractive, he hastened to add:



"Doubtless, monsieur missionary, you will take something."

The detective gave a non-committal gesture that his host took for one of assent.

"Whisky?" he asked.

Chantecoq's eyes, shaded by heavy eyebrows, gave a slight twinkle.

Instantly, Wilbright put out his hand towards the bottle. With a timidity, that contrasted with his appearance, the false missionary said:

"If it is all the same to you, I would rather have a little liqueur brandy."

"By all means."

Wilbright took up a little bottle and filled two large liqueur glasses with the golden liquid.

At that moment, Chantecoq, very adroitly, unfastened the large flat top which shut the container inside his stick.

He said to himself:

"I can drink this first glass safely because I'm sure this brandy is not poisoned, since he is drinking it too. In the meanwhile, I must prepare for the second and for others that, after what Le Bosser has told me, he is sure to offer."

Chantecoq took the glass offered by the American, who, when he had handed it, took the other one and put it to his lips. The brandy was of an inferior quality.

"There is no doubt," thought the great detective, "that Americans do not appreciate good stuff. . . ."

He put his half-empty glass on the table and with great rapidity and skill, showing that he had often done it before, Chantecoq hastened to pour into the reservoir inside his stick the liquor that he preferred not to drink.

Then he added quietly:

"May I come straight away to the object of my visit?"

"By all means."

"Well, I wrote to you that I should be very grateful if you would give me some details regarding the ghosts which were seen here last winter."

The American swallowed in one gulp the brandy which was of an inferior quality, the manservant having substituted it for the good old brandy that he preferred to drink himself.

"To tell you the truth, monsieur missionary, no ghosts appeared . . . but loud knockings on the doors and windows, which opened by themselves, with strange noises, cries, sobs, groans. . . ."

"All that is very strange," said the detective with emphasis, "and from what I have heard, it happened on Christmas night."

"That is so."

"You were alone?"

"No, I had several guests."

"They all heard the noises?"

"Yes, all."

"And no one has seen anything?"

"Nobody."

"I suppose you made a note of what happened, in writing?"

"I drew up a statement and my guests all approved and signed it."

"I don't suppose you care to show it to me?"

"With pleasure. . . . But you are not drinking, monsieur missionary?"

"Excuse me, I have not got a very strong head."

The American re-filled the glass from which a few moments before he had swallowed the contents in such a masterly manner and emptied it in a flash.

Then he replied:



"I have left the statement in my room. With your permission I will go and fetch it."

"Certainly, forgive me for troubling you."

James went towards the staircase that led directly from his studio to the first floor, when Harold appeared announcing:

"M. Lachesnaye."

Wilbright said:

"Show him into the small room, I will be with him in a moment."

Harold went out. The American went upstairs and disappeared through a door in the gallery.

Left alone, Chantecoq said to himself:

"I should like to know what takes place between Lachesnaye and Wilbright."

Three minutes later Wilbright reappeared. He seemed disappointed and as he came down the stairs he called out to the pseudo-missionary:

"I'm very sorry, but I can't find the paper I spoke of. I'm afraid I may have taken it to Paris by mistake on my last visit."

"As soon as the person who has come to see me has gone, I will search again. I won't ask you to wait because I should keep you some time. But if you are staying at Vannes for some days, I shall have great pleasure in sending you the document in question."

"You are more than kind, monsieur," said the king of detectives as he rose to go.

"Monsieur missionary," replied James, "pardon me for not being able to give you more time, but I did not expect your visit and I had made an appointment that I cannot put off."

The sleuth-hound replied:

"It is for me, monsieur, to apologise for having taken advantage of your extreme kindness. May I rely upon your promise?"

"You can."

The American escorted him to the hall and Harold opened the door.

Chantecoq, as he crossed the threshold, leant on his reservoir stick and sauntered off.

During this time, Wilbright put his studio straight, and opening the door into the little room, he called out:

"My dear fellow, come in, will you?"

Lacesnaye came forward with outstretched hand. Wilbright gripped it hard in American fashion and then he said:

"I was busy getting rid, as politely as I could, of an old buffer of a parson who, it seems, is interested in spiritualism.

"Having heard tell that there are ghosts here, he came to interview me."

Lachesnaye looking hard at his friend, said:

"I suppose it is to talk to me about those ghosts that you have asked me here in such a hurry?"

"No, old fellow," replied James, in a rather serious tone . . . "if, instead of coming to see you, I have begged you to come to me as soon as you could, it is because I have something very straight but quite friendly to say to you."

"About what?" asked the young artist, rather astonished.

The American replied:

"Why haven't you told me the whole truth? Why have you kept secrets from me, on whom, of all your friends, you can rely?"

Lachesnaye replied:

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Think a little."

"What's the good. Why not tell me right out what you mean? It will be easier for me to answer you."

"Perhaps so," agreed James. "You told me yester-



day that the two servants who had just come to your house were only two police inspectors from the Rennes flying squad."

"Yes, and so?"

"I am sorry to tell you, my dear Lachesnaye, that you have misled me, and that intentionally, which has upset me very much. These two so-called inspectors were no others than the detective Chantecoq and his assistant."

"May I ask how you found that out?" exclaimed Lachesnaye whose genial tone had become icy.

Unabashed, Wilbright said:

"I will only tell you, my good fellow, when you tell me why you thought it necessary to treat me in this way."

Without being in the least embarrassed the artist replied:

"It was Chantecoq who made me promise that I would not reveal his identity to a living soul, and I don't see how this deception, which was forced upon me, can offend you."

"You might have asked Chantecoq to make an exception in my favour."

"He had made up his mind too firmly for me to ask him to let me make any exception."

"Does he suspect me then?"

"Of what?"

"Why, of course, my good fellow, of being concerned in the abduction of your boy."

"I don't really see why you should ask me such a question?"

"I gather you are too uneasy to reply? But in spite of everything I am still your friend, and I do not mean this police chap, who is doing his duty, very badly it is true, to believe me capable of such an action, and I intend to give you proof of that right now."

Solemnly Wilbright continued:

"This morning I have had a visit from a man who says that he knows what became of your little Jackie and the place where he is to be found, adding that for the sum of five hundred thousand francs he could get you back your child. He said that if you refuse to entertain this offer the child will remain in the hands of those who hold him, in a place where the most clever police detectives, including even M. Chantecoq, cannot get him back, and further, that if anyone molests him or has him arrested not only will he not divulge the child's whereabouts, but in twenty-four hours Jackie will be murdered. That is why I sent for you so urgently."

"Thank you," replied the young artist, coldly, "but before considering the offer that you have made me I should like to ask one question."

"Yes, sure, what is it?"

"How comes it that this intermediary comes to you and not to me?"

"For two reasons," explained James. "First, because he knew that I was your faithful friend and that I should at once be willing to act as an intermediary between him and you; and second, because, knowing my American nationality, he saw in me a man fitted to deal with a business that in France might appear to you preposterous; but in our country such a suggestion would seem more ordinary."

"Then what is your advice?" Lachesnaye asked coldly.

Wilbright replied:

"Don't hesitate, it is best to comply with the demands of these bandits."

"I have not got five hundred thousand francs handy," said the young artist. "I should have to sell out. And that would take time."

"They will wait. The instant you agree to that



arrangement they will make no difficulty and will give you the necessary time."

The artist objected:

"Who knows, when the money is paid, if they will give me back my child?"

Without turning a hair, the American said:

"That is exactly what I said to the messenger. He said I need have no fear on that score and he was ready to put himself in our hands until the child was given up."

Lachesnaye who had showed great self-restraint, felt that his temper was beginning to get the better of him.

As he did not reply, trying to master himself, Wilbright asked:

"Well, you don't say anything? Aren't you going to reply?"

"I cannot reply."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot entertain the proposition."

"You think the amount too large?"

"No, I find the whole thing too revolting."

"My good fellow, when one is in a fix, one can't do anything else."

Lachesnaye, fuming, exclaimed:

"How do you mean, one can't do anything else?"

And pulling himself up to his full height he went up to Wilbright and said, threateningly:

"Just now, you taxed me for not telling you the truth. . . . Now I say to you: Wilbright, you are a liar! Nobody has been to your house this morning to suggest this bargain to you. . . .

"The messenger is you, yourself!"

"Me?"

"Yes, it is you and nobody else. Tell me straight away where my boy is. . . . I"

"You are mad."

"No, I'm perfectly sane . . . speak, I say . . . or I'll . . ."

He did not finish his sentence . . . Wilbright, seizing him by the throat, yelled:

"If you say another word I'll strangle you."

Mad with rage, Lachesnaye was about to rush at the man whom the evening before he looked upon as his best friend, but who to-day showed himself a dastardly traitor. . . . Before he could do so however, the American taking his revolver out of his pocket, aimed it at the young artist. . . . He seized him by the wrist and tried to disarm him. A fierce struggle followed. . . . A shot rang out, when the door of the studio suddenly opened, and Chantecoq, still dressed as a missionary, threw himself with a bound upon Wilbright, and landing him a terrible upper-cut, laid him flat on the ground where he remained senseless. Then, turning to Lachesnaye, he exclaimed in his ringing voice:

"Stupid fellow. How silly to put your head into the lion's mouth. Luckily, I was on the watch."

"Monsieur Chantecoq," exclaimed the young artist who had recognised the detective's voice.

"Yes, it is I! Now let us wait until this miserable rascal regains his senses so that he can undergo a closer questioning.

"If he won't speak we can, as a last resource, interrogate his manservant."

"Harold?"

"Yes.

"Just now he is not in a position to reply, for he is in a deep sleep."

Smiling under his beard, and taking from his cassock pocket the curious-looking pistol which he had made use of in his exploration of the *Cave of the Winds*, the great sleuth-hound explained:

"This gun, invented by one of my friends, a great



scientist and mechanic, does not fire ordinary bullets, but a projectile fired by a metallic spring which lets loose, when it strikes a target, soporific gas, which sends a person to sleep for at least two hours.

"While the heads of the police are considering its adoption for their inspectors and detectives, I have been using it. The reason I did not use it just now against Wilbright, is because you were so near him that, unfortunately, you would have been sent to sleep as well.

"Thinking that not very expedient, I preferred to use a more personal method which would not cause you any inconvenience.

"Now, whilst we are waiting for your neighbour to come to, will you explain to me the cause of your scuffle with Wilbright?"

Lachesnaye told Chantecoq of Harold's telephone call and the interview he had just had with the American.

The king of detectives said:

"As you have quickly realised, Wilbright is not the intermediary between you and the gang of robbers that has stolen your child with the idea of blackmail.

"Realising that he was about to be unmasked as the accomplice in the abduction of little Jackie, he meant to take the bull by the horns, and with a bold stroke get a sum of money out of you that he greatly needed.

"Didn't you tell me that for some time he has been very morose?"

"Quite true."

"You put down his melancholy to some love trouble."

"I did."

"You were wrong . . . Wilbright is ruined . . . I discovered that from our mutual friend Le Bosser.

. . . He, being discreet, did not speak of it but he did not hide from me the fact that Wilbright has not paid the builder who did up his house who, after many applications for his money, has threatened to summons him for the amount."

"Monsieur Chantecoq," exclaimed Lachesnaye, "you are really marvellous."

"Oh, no. . . ."

"You never forget any detail nor any factor, even the psychological ones."

"Those are sometimes the most important because they enable you to judge from effect to cause, and in police matters the truth is the basis of everything."

"But take care, our friend James is about to come to his senses. I want you to stretch yourself flat on the divan, turn your face to the wall as if you were dead, until I tell you to get up."

"Don't ask why, because I have not time to explain to you. . . . Besides, have a little patience; you will not be long before you know. . . . It is simply a little artfulness on my part."

Lachesnaye immediately lay upon the divan exactly as the detective had requested him.

A moment or two later, Wilbright opened his eyes and instinctively put his hand to his painful chin, bruised by the knock-out blow.

First he turned his haggard eyes towards the false missionary who stood before him and masked Lachesnaye from him.

"You!" said he in a sullen voice.

He tried to call: "Harold!"

But the king of detectives said to him:

"Quite useless, he won't hear you. He has gone to fetch Doctor Le Bosser."

"Doctor Le Bosser?"

"Your telephone did not work so your man started off on his bicycle."



"Doctor Le Bosser?" repeated the American as he sat up.

And, opening his eyes wide, he added:

"Why?"

"You've done a nice thing," said the detective.

"Me?" muttered the wretched man who had not quite regained his senses.

"Look!" said Chantecoq, pointing to the young artist lying like a log on the sofa.

"Lachesnaye!" he said drawing his hand over his forehead.

"Yes, Lachesnaye," the detective replied in a confident tone.

"Dead?" gasped the American in alarm.

"No, wounded in the shoulder. It was lucky for you that I came in time to knock up your arm, otherwise you would have shot him through the heart . . . and then it would have been very difficult to settle this business."

"Settle this business!" repeated Wilbright staring at the missionary.

The truth suddenly dawned upon him.

"I understand," he said. . . . "You are Chantecoq."

"As a matter of fact, I am Chantecoq . . . come along . . . up you get . . . pull yourself together and listen to me quietly. But mind you, if you make the least attempt to attack me, I shan't miss *you*, you may be sure of that, and I promise you, you'll have a bad time."

Then, pointing to an arm-chair in the middle of the studio, he said:

"Sit there . . . and don't move. . . . Take my advice."

Cowed by the dominating influence of the detective, Wilbright did as he was told, with childlike obedience. He felt that up against such an adversary it was the

only thing to do, and that any attempt at resistance would make things worse, and that it was best to fall in with the wishes of this formidable fellow.

Chantecoq was much too far-sighted not to have realised at once the American's state of mind, and recognised that he was not a professional crook who has a thousand and one dodges at his fingers' ends, by means of which he often escapes the net of justice however small its meshes may be; but an accidental criminal who certainly was not without a certain aptitude for the business, but had not acquired the experience and tricks of the trade.

A cat will play with a mouse. Chantecoq attacked at once, because as usual, he had determined to bring things to a head as quickly as possible.

"Monsieur Wilbright, I will go straight to the point. . . . I want to know what has become of little Jackie, your neighbour's son, whose father you tried to murder just now. . . . You had better tell me right away."

"But, monsieur. . . ."

"It is no good professing ignorance or trying to wriggle out of it. A few minutes ago, you demanded five hundred thousand francs from M. Lachesnaye. I do not demand, I order you to tell me, for nothing."

"I personally do not know," replied Wilbright, shiftily; "it was someone else who . . ."

Chantecoq interrupted him.

"Don't try any silly nonsense with me. . . . I know the whole story and I'll prove it to you."

"Your brother, widower of the wealthy Colmadge's daughter, had a little boy six months old, who was very ill and had not very long to live . . . that did not suit his book, because if the child died he would not have control of the fortune which would have come to the little fellow, and so he would lose his



hold of the wealth that he had counted upon handling."

James was about to reply, but Chantecoq continued:

"Wait, I have not finished. . . . I am just beginning. . . .

"Your brother, who, like you, is a man without scruples, conceived the idea, ingenious may be, but dastardly, of substituting for his ailing baby a strong and healthy child.

"At the moment he is in need of money."

The American attempted to protest.

Chantecoq continued:

"Yes, Monsieur Wilbright, in urgent need. . . . I know all about your financial position. . . . You approached your brother who, taking advantage of your circumstances and knowing you had need of his help, used you to assist him in the execution of his plot."

James did not flinch, though he was stunned by the opening of this accusation. . . . He felt sure, in fact, at the outset of the interview that Chantecoq would try to get at the truth. . . . Nothing of the kind. . . . It was the detective who, with absolute accuracy, told him every detail as though it had happened to himself.

The king of detectives went on in a quiet, cynical manner that made him so formidable.

"You accepted with readiness, as you had under your hand the very article, that is to say, little Lachesnaye, the son of your neighbour and friend.

"Accepting the dictum which says that in business there is no friendship, without the slightest hesitation, you cast to the winds your duty to him.

"The difficulty was to get hold of the child. . . . That did not deter you, and you began at once to think out a plan to accomplish your purpose.

"Having discovered, I don't know how, and it is

of little consequence, that by the *Cave of the Winds* one could reach a subterranean passage that led to the side of the well under the basement of the Lachesnayes' villa, you said, very naturally, that it would be very useful in carrying out your brother's request.

"Further, you had heard from the peasants in the district that there were ghosts of royalists who had been shot in the Revolution by Hoche's soldiers in the old fort which stood where Ker-Yvette is built.

"Displaying an imagination that many novelists would envy, in order to prepare the ground for your business and bolster up your scheme, you started by giving out to the neighbourhood that ghosts had visited your house.

"To justify this story you said that several friends of yours had seen the manifestations and had afterwards signed a document. I shall ask you to produce directly that declaration, and you will have great difficulty in doing so, *since it has never existed*.

"Before organising the performance you naturally needed accomplices. By chance, little Jackie's nurse was formerly in the Colmadges' service.

"This woman, under the guise of simplicity, kindheartedness and sincerity, was so greedy for money that she would do anything to get it.

"Informed of this by your brother you sounded her on the subject. You were not unwise enough to ask her to steal little Jackie. . . . You knew well that she would refuse for fear of the consequences.

"By means of a good sum and promises of further reward, you won not only her neutrality but all the information necessary to carry out your design."

More and more amazed, Wilbright listened to Chantecoq. His narrative was the exact truth.

He was not simply a king of detectives; he was a



magician. The American's terror was not yet at an end.

The detective continued further:

"This Nannie did not let you down. On the contrary, she played her part to perfection. She gave you good value for your money. I will continue:

"As soon as you knew you could count on her you acted quickly.

"Your brother, as I have just found out, yes, your brother to whom you revealed the discovery of the subterranean passage and explained to him how it could be used without danger, as you have already done, arrived yesterday in a motor launch of the latest type, piloted by a sailor who knew this dangerous coast.

"During this time you pretended to Doctor Le Bosser, who, with you, had dined at the Lachesnayes' and was accompanying you home, that you had taken some drug which had given you a temperature. . . . All that was done to prove, in case of need, a perfect alibi. And further . . .

"In order to frighten the servants of Ker-Yvette, whose presence would have upset your plans, your brother and his associates, whose names I don't know, caused panic among the whole household, except the Nannie, who was in the know, and did not flee from the house with the other servants.

"The master and mistress obviously might have done the same. . . . But you knew Lachesnaye well and were convinced that he was not the man to be frightened by phantoms, but that he would want to fathom the weird mystery.

"You knew also that Madame Lachesnaye was not a woman to leave her husband alone in this reputedly haunted house. It was all very well arranged and carried out. . . . You had even the ingenious idea

of putting in position the sheet-iron which covered the end of the passage and of keeping the mechanism which opened it away from the inside of the well. That was very clever. . . . And I admit that for amateurs you did your work well.

"There was also a ball of fire which seemed to roll round that garden, along the passages and even down the stairs . . . that is a new trick, of which I should like to know the secret, and which proves conclusively that you have, among your acquaintances, either a remarkable illusionist or a clever cinema producer."

Chantecoq paused.

After having glanced at Lachesnaye who, following Chantecoq's instructions had kept perfectly still, he went on:

"Now let us follow the course of events: The next morning, someone, no matter who, as I have told you already I do not bother about trifles, informed you that Doctor Le Bosser and Lachesnaye had had an interview with the police at Quiberon; the chief inspectors had arranged to come and pass the next night at Ker-Yvette; your brother or you had poison put into a dish of mussels that these two officers ate; not deadly, but enough to stop their activities for several days. . . .

"As for the customs men who had also promised to help, I have learned this morning through my secretary whom I ordered to make an inquiry into the matter, that the chief received an anonymous letter warning him that at Penthievre, in the middle of that night, some smugglers were going to land secretly a cargo of tobacco. So they left the ghosts and went after the living, who, of course, never appeared. In short, it all shows wonderful organisation. I congratulate you. . . .

"Once the field was clear, whilst Doctor Le Bosser prescribed a quinine tablet for you and was a few



minutes later to be knocked out in a more brutal manner than the customs men, the abduction of little Jackie took place, preceded and accompanied by manifestations that I need not dilate upon.

"In a word, the coup succeeded . . . Jackie was abducted. . . . Another child was substituted: your brother's . . . he had shrunk from so atrocious a crime as that of hastening the death of this poor child—his own son.

"Everything seemed to favour his scheme. Mme. Lachesnaye, when she discovered the substitution, received such a shock that she lost her reason.

"This partial madness caused her to think that the poor little child that had been substituted was her own son. She merely thinks that her Jackie is ill.

"In order not to give the poor lady a terrible shock, Lachesnaye and Doctor Le Bosser humoured her. . . . This fact hinders Lachesnaye from taking action and stops the course of justice.

"Up to that point your brother and you were fortunate, but your luck changed. Lachesnaye learned from Le Bosser that I was in the district. . . . Le Bosser is an old war-time pal . . . you have never been to the front, neither has your brother . . . therefore you cannot understand how strong are the bonds of friendship that are made in the trenches and on the battlefield.

"At Le Bosser's request, I accepted the job immediately, in the middle of my holiday.

"I soon suspected that Anne was connected with the abduction of little Jackie . . . and when I learned that you had invited M. and Mme. Lachesnaye to dinner and to spend the evening with you, I said to myself that the coming night would certainly be marked by fresh incidents which would probably put me on the track that I wanted . . . because I confess

to you, that after the confidence that Anne had given me, I was more sure than ever that I was on the right road.

"I determined, however, to explore the subterranean passage that I had discovered; not from the seashore, but from the inside of the well.

"I acted wisely, as I found a ring that your brother had lost the evening before in coming to fetch little Jackie.

"You may ask, I daresay, how the devil Chantecoq knew to whom the ring belonged . . . ? That is my secret which you must allow me to keep.

"But your brother who had realised the loss—maybe because it was a present from his wife when he was engaged; maybe because it was of great value—sent two men to search the passage. . . . They did not go very far. . . .

"After having fired at me and missed, they took a header into the *Cave of the Winds* which has taken its revenge for the success that your brother and you have obtained from it.

"I could recount other incidents . . . but you ought now to be sufficiently convinced that I know enough to lock you up at once if you do not answer promptly and accurately the simple question I am going to ask you. . . .

"Where is Jackie?"

"I have no idea," replied the American.

"Don't start lying."

"I am not lying."

"We won't waste time in useless words. . . . I'll settle you. . . ."

And taking his soporific pistol from his pocket, he pointed it at James, saying:

"I have here something that will not kill you, but will keep you quiet for two hours, that is to say, just long enough to go and fetch the police from Quiberon



and hand you over on the double charge of attempted assassination and complicity in abduction."

As Wilbright did not speak, Chantecoq added:

"You don't believe me?"

And keeping the American at bay with his weapon, the detective stepped backwards to the door leading into the hall, opened it wide and showed him Harold who was lying stretched upon the floor, and said:

"Your servant has had a taste of it. When he awakes he will be able to tell you about it."

Wilbright muttered:

"There is no doubt, with a devil of a man like this, one can do nothing."

However, anxious to be assured, he said:

"If I do speak, what guarantee have I that you will not give me in charge?"

"You don't know me," exclaimed the king of detectives, "or rather you only partly know me. . . . I have never broken my word to anyone, and I promise you that if, owing to you, little Jackie is given back to his parents, you have no need to be alarmed . . . I am not trying to send people to prison nor to make useless arrests . . . neither do I want to get my own back nor exact severe penalties of the law. . . .

"In short, my business is to restore the child that has been stolen. . . . The moment the culprits give the child to me . . . the affair is at an end. . . . They can look elsewhere to be arrested."

"But Lachesnaye?" inquired the American.

"Lachesnaye," said the detective, "as soon as he has found his boy will not demand anything further, and if I tell him what I have promised you, you can feel quite safe. . . . I am sure he will respect any arrangement into which I have entered.

"He will probably cease to have anything to do with you . . . and that is all. . . .

"Now what do you say?"

The American did not speak.

Chantecoq casually took from his cassock pocket the soporific pistol with which he had threatened him, and realising it was not the time to beat about the bush, James exclaimed:

"Very well, I'll tell you. . . .

"I admit that all you have said, Monsieur Chantecoq, is absolutely true . . . and things have happened as you have stated.

"As for the child, he is at Trinité-sur-Mer, carefully hidden in a villa called Ker-Bihan, where my brother is also hiding.

"He ought to have gone yesterday to Cherbourg, with little Jackie and a new nurse that he has brought with him. . . . There he intended to take the boat for America. He was anxious, in fact, that the Colmadges should not find out that he had substituted another child in place of their grandchild . . . but my brother was injured so severely in the leg, against a rock in the *Cave of the Winds*, that he was forced to postpone his voyage. . . . That is all I can tell you. . . ."

"It is up to you to put this matter right."

"I think that from your point of view, it would be wiser if I did not have anything to do with him. I have told you everything Monsieur Chantecoq . . . I trust you. I only ask you to assure me that Lachesnaye will keep his word, as you have promised for him."

"Reply, Monsieur Lachesnaye," said Chantecoq.

"I will do so," said a trembling voice.

And the young artist getting up, remarked as he went near to the American who could hardly believe his eyes and his ears:

"You are a miserable hound who deserves severe punishment, for, owing to you, I have nearly lost everything in the world that I prize . . . every-



thing that made life worth living—my wife and my child.

“But I am a man of sufficient honour not to break the promise that M. Chantecoq has made, and rightly made, in my name, as regards your safety.

“Wilbright, I will not bring any action against you . . . you shall bear your own punishment and may you feel the weight of it.”

The American inquired:

“Then you are not wounded?”

“No,” replied Lachesnaye, “but if it had not been for Monsieur Chantecoq I should have been murdered. . . . You are greatly in his debt, for in saving my life he has also saved your head.”

“I was mad, I lost my senses,” murmured James, absolutely overcome.”

“I should like to believe it of you,” replied the king of detectives.

“Now my dear Monsieur Lachesnaye, I am going to ask you to take me at once, in your car, to Trinité-sur-Mer, where I shall have a little explanation from Douglas Wilbright; which will take, I feel sure, much less time than that which I have just had with his brother. . . .

“But as I am a cautious man above everything and do not wish that Wilbright number one may be warned by Wilbright number two of our approaching visit, I am going to adopt a harmless but effective means to stop any communication between them.”

Before the American had time to try and save himself, Chantecoq, who had kept the soporific pistol in his hand, aimed it at him and pulled the trigger.

There was a dull thud—James swayed backwards and forwards and fell upon the divan that Lachesnaye had just vacated.

"Now we will start," said the great sleuth-hound quickly.

"Let me get my car and I am ready."

Chantecoq surveyed the field of battle where he had just won such an astounding victory. His two victims, Wilbright and Harold, were literally overpowered: one on the divan in the studio, the other on the floor in the hall, with their arms extended as if they were calling out "Camerad."

Quietly, the false missionary left the house, shut the door and waited for Lachesnaye.

Soon the hum of the engine announced its arrival.

Chantecoq, seeing the six-cylinder sports model which the young artist was driving, jumped up and asked him to make straight for Ker-Hostin.

"I want," he said, "to finish this business as Chantecoq . . . but don't worry, I shan't be long . . . I am very nippy at this sort of work."

"I know that," remarked Lachesnaye whose heart was beating with impatience and anxiety at the thought that he was going to see his little Jackie. As the detective had said, Lachesnaye did not have to wait long. Twenty minutes after he got to his house, Chantecoq reappeared in his ordinary attire followed by Meteor, to whom, whilst taking off his make-up and changing his clothes, he had told with his usual precision the details of his interview with Wilbright.

The detective's face expressed legitimate satisfaction. . . . The end was near.

He said to Lachesnaye:

"Forgive me for not sitting next to you . . . but I want to talk to my secretary."

He settled himself in the back of the car.

The artist drove on.

The nine miles which separated Kerhostin from Trinité-sur-Mer were covered in less than a quarter



of an hour. As they arrived at the bridge, Meteor, who listened, as he always did, with great attention to the instructions of his chief, asked a fisherman:

"Do you know villa Ker-Bihan?"

The fisherman replied:

"It is down there at the far end of the quay . . . a white house at the edge of the wood . . . you can see it from here. . . ."

"The one with smoke coming out of the chimney?" said the secretary.

"That's it."

Lachesnaye started off in that direction.

Chantecoq said to the artist:

"I shall go into the house by myself. . . . Meteor has my instructions and will tell you what to do."

Chantecoq rang the bell at the garden gate . . . it was a nice unpretentious villa, that looked much more like a retreat or the house of some well-to-do retired person than that of an American with a millionaire father-in-law.

A manservant came to open the gate. Chantecoq said to him with perfect assurance:

"I am Doctor Le Bosser, of Quiberon, and I come on behalf of M. James Wilbright who asked me to call on your master."

"I will go and tell monsieur," said the manservant. "Will Monsieur Doctor kindly wait a minute?"

"Certainly."

A few minutes later the servant came back and asked the false doctor to follow him.

Without any suspicion Colmadges' son-in-law fell into the trap that the detective had set for him.

Douglas Wilbright was reclining in the sitting-room in a wicker chair . . . his right leg was swathed in bandages. . . . He seemed to be in pain.

He was very like his younger brother and was of

the ordinary Anglo-Saxon type that seem to be made all of one pattern.

"Doctor," said he in fairly good French, but with a distinct American accent, "thank you very much for coming to see me, for I am very ill. The Carnac doctor, who is attending me, has not hesitated to say that my wound has taken a very bad turn and has advised me to go to the clinic at Ker-Anna, where there is a first-rate surgeon who, in cases of necessity, could operate on me very skilfully . . . but it is very distasteful for me to go from here and leave my little boy, a baby six months old, in charge of a nurse that I hardly know, as she only entered my service yesterday. . . . May I show you my wound . . . ?"

"That would be useless," cut in the detective.

"Why?"

"Because I am not a doctor."

Douglas Wilbright gave a start of surprise.

"What?" he said, "you are not Doctor Le Bosser?"

"No, I am Chantecoq, the private detective."

"Chantecoq," repeated the American trembling.

"What then! monsieur, you have dared to enter my house under a false name?"

"Yes, because if I had introduced myself under my own name you would have shut the door in my face!

"*Well, it was absolutely necessary for me to see you!*"

"I order you to leave my house."

"Now, do not excite yourself, monsieur . . . to begin with, that would make you worse and it is not good for you to send up your temperature. Besides, don't think that I come here with hostile intentions towards you. . . . Far from it. . . . As I have told you, I am a private detective and I come on business.

"Holiday making in the neighbourhood of Quiberon,



I heard that you have lost a ring, which you value very much, and I have had it in my mind to find it for you.

"I have done so and have brought it. I wish to return it to you, but on one condition."

"What is that?" asked the elder Wilbright who began to understand his visitor's motive.

The detective replied in his most affable manner:

"That you restore to me in exchange for this ring the child that you stole two nights ago from the people who live at Ker-Yvette."

The American gave another start . . . this time it was not one of surprise, but of fear.

Nevertheless he protested:

"Monsieur, I don't understand you."

"You understand me perfectly . . ." said Chantecoq firmly.

"The child that is here is my own."

"No, monsieur . . . yours is at Ker-Yvette and it is quite easy to prove it, and if you persist in your denials I shall put that law in motion."

The elder Wilbright replied:

"It is very unfair to take advantage of me, now that I am hurt and naturally defenceless."

Chantecoq, quite unmoved, replied:

"I suppose that you do not suggest that I am responsible for your accident? However serious the consequences may be, that does not alter the fact that you have plunged a family into a state of desperation by stealing from them their child. . . .

"I am aware that you have no sense of paternity . . . for you have not hesitated to abandon your own son. . . .

"And while speaking of your child . . . he is a poor little fellow, in a sorry state, and seems very ill indeed.

"I am particularly curious to know why you have

stamped on his arm a circle with R.F. in the middle of it; they are, I imagine his initials?"

"Quite true," admitted the American, more and more perplexed. . . . "My son's name is Roland Frank, but I never had them printed on his arm."

"If you have not done it," said the detective, "it has probably been done by your parents-in-law who, realising that you were quite capable of substituting for your dying child another baby, have, unknown to you, put this mark so as to expose your diabolical scheme."

"It is terrible," muttered Douglas . . . "but I don't know. . . ."

"Come now, monsieur, that's better; if you behave sensibly you will be forgiven. . . . Because, as I have just said to your brother, I have only one object in view: to find the lost child and restore him to his parents. . . . Nothing else concerns me.

"Send for your man-servant at once and tell him to bring little Jackie immediately so that you can give him back to his father without delay."

"There is no need, Monsieur Chantecoq," exclaimed a happy voice. It was Lachesnaye who appeared, carrying his boy in his arms.

Meteor who was following him, explained:

"We found him, alone, at the bottom of the garden in the shade, asleep in his perambulator."

And the young artist added:

"I could not resist taking him."

"You were right," agreed Chantecoq, "and no one will think of interfering with you. Isn't that so, Monsieur Wilbright?"

"I suppose now there is nothing for you to do but to send me to prison," muttered the American.

"No," said the king of detectives, "unless M. Lachesnaye insists, as he has the right to do."



"I don't," replied Jean. "However, I make one stipulation."

"What is it?" asked the elder Wilbright anxiously

"It is that as soon as your leg is better, you will leave France and never come back."

"And my son?"

"Your son," answered Chantecoq, "will not be given back to you."

"Why?"

"Because you must not be given the chance of repeating what you have attempted."

"I will telephone at once," added Lachesnaye, "to your parents-in-law to come and fetch him . . . with good nursing they will perhaps save him and even cure him entirely. That is all I want."

Beaten all along the line, and suffering more and more from his wound, Wilbright made a gesture of despair, in absolute submission to the demands of Chantecoq and Lachesnaye. They were about to leave with little Jackie, when the nurse appeared in a great state of alarm:

"Monsieur, monsieur," she said, "little Robert is not in his perambulator . . . someone has stolen him whilst I was in the house getting some needles."

"No, my girl," interposed the great detective . . . "someone has taken him, which is not quite the same thing."

And pointing to Douglas Wilbright who, very pale, was biting his lips, he continued:

"Monsieur will tell you as much about it as he thinks fit."

And leaving the nurse staggered, staring at her master, the detective and his secretary and the young artist, who held his child close to him, went out . . . they got into the car.

"Now," remarked Chantecoq, "we have got to break the news to Mme. Lachesnaye. . . ."

"It must be done very gently . . . we had better leave it to Le Bosser. . . .

"We will go straight to Quiberon, pick him up and take him with us to Ker-Yvette."

"Quite right," agreed Lachesnaye, who, in order to take the wheel, handed Jackie to Meteor. As he took him on his knee he said:

"Yesterday I was a cook, to-day a nurse. Who knows? One day I may be a midwife."

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later Doctor Le Bosser arrived at the villa with Lachesnaye.

They were accompanied by a healthy, well set-up young woman whom they had fetched from Massémeur village.

Lachesnaye sent her into the studio with the Doctor whilst he went to fetch his wife who was busy writing letters.

"Doctor Le Bosser is downstairs," he said, "and would like to speak to you."

"That's very fortunate," she said, "I was just going to telephone and ask him to come. Baby is not very well. Just let me seal up this letter and I'll come down to him."

Jean went down wondering how his wife would take this fresh shock. In his anxiety he knew that sudden joy is often as dangerous as sudden grief. His heart beat with suspense as he went into the studio.

A few minutes afterwards Yvette came down.

"My dear Doctor," she said, "I was just telling Jean that I was on the point of telephoning to you. Baby is not well."

"I know why," the Doctor replied instantly. "It does not surprise me, because I know that you



think a great deal of Anne. . . but you must not keep her . . . I find her unsatisfactory."

"Change the nurse? That is a very risky thing to do."

"Yes, very. That is why I have brought this person whom I can recommend and who can take her place at once."

"How can I dismiss her? She is so devoted, and so attached to us."

"Let me do it," said the young artist. "Is she upstairs?"

"Yes, in the nursery."

"If you will wait here with Rose, Le Bosser and I will go and arrange it all."

"Very well," agreed the young wife . . . "give her good compensation; she deserves it."

"All right."

The artist and the Doctor found Anne sewing quietly near her charge. Le Bosser opened the proceedings at once:

"You are a wretched woman and deserve to go straight to prison."

"Me!" exclaimed the woman from Havre turning white; "oh, how dare you, how can you. . . ."

The Doctor continued:

"There's no need to waste your time in arguing. You have played a disgraceful game . . . you are personally concerned in a blackguardly crime. . . . There's no use denying it. . . . We have absolute proof! . . . You will get out of here at once. . . . You shall have time to pack your trunk. . . . Hurry up."

And Anne did not want telling twice. She went to the loft to fetch her trunk. As soon as she had gone, Lachesnaye opened the dressing-room door where Chantecoq and Meteor were waiting, the latter still carrying little Jackie in his arms.

"Come along," he said.

They went into the nursery.

"Now," said Le Bosser, "you can tell Mme. Lachesnaye to come up."

Jean hurried off. The doctor continued:

"My dear Chantecoq, as you have found Mme. Lachesnaye's son you shall have the honour and the pleasure of giving him to her."

The secretary handed little Jackie to Chantecoq. . . . Footsteps were heard on the staircase. The door opened. . . . Yvette appeared with her husband.

On seeing the detective with the child in his arms, she uttered a cry of astonishment . . . then running to the cot she bent over it. . . . Wilbright's child was sleeping feverishly and very restlessly. . . .

She turned to Chantecoq and in a great outburst of mother love cried out:

"He is mine . . . my own little Jackie."

She clasped him in her arms, covered him with kisses; and then she said:

"Now I remember . . . he was stolen . . . yes . . . he was stolen . . . wasn't he? . . . Now, all is coming back to me . . . I have been out of my mind."

"No," Doctor Le Bosser suggested kindly, "illusioned."

And indicating Chantecoq, he added:

"Let me introduce the famous detective Chantecoq to you, who, thanks to one of his wonderful methods, of which he alone had the secret, has in forty-eight hours found your dear baby."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Yvette, overcome with joy, "I cannot find words to express my gratitude."

After choking down her emotion she could only murmur:

"Thank you, thank you . . .!"

Le Bosser, indicating Meteor, continued:

"Chantecoq's secretary has also been splendid."



Meteor puffed out his cheeks . . . then he said:  
"Especially as a cook."

"As a cook?" repeated Yvette, smiling through her tears of joy.

"Armandine," explained Lachesnaye. . . . "There she is."

"And I am Augustin, at your service," added the king of detectives.

"Ah, now I understand everything," said the young wife who had completely recovered her self-possession.

Then, pointing to the cot where poor little Robert Frank was lying, she asked:

"And this little one?"

Le Bosser, putting his hand on Chantecoq's shoulder, exclaimed:

"Now, my good friend, you can explain everything . . . !"

## EPILOGUE

Two days afterwards, Douglas Wilbright was removed to a nursing home at Carnac. His wound had taken a turn for the worse. It was too late to operate. . . . In the evening he died of blood poisoning.

As for his younger brother, just as Lachesnaye had said, he paid the penalty. . . . Three months later, overwhelmed with accumulated debts, he committed suicide, shooting himself in the head.

His manservant, Harold, was arrested the following day for theft, having broken the lock of his master's writing table and taken the small amount of money that was left.

The nurse, Anne, went back to Le Havre, sorrowful and repentant, vowing never again to try and earn money except in an honest way.

The Colmadges, having got back their little grandson, had the joy of seeing him restored to health, and Chantecoq once more had the right to say:

"When anyone says to me there is no such thing as justice here, I reply that it is because those who seek it do not know how to find it, and those who do, don't know how to use it."

C. R. L. S. 10/1/1911

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